AN

APOLOGY

FOR PROFESSING THE

RELIGION OF NATURE,

IN

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY OF THE CHRISTIAN ÆRA;

ADDRESSED TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND DR. WATSON,

LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF.

Κοινα των Ἀνθρώπων δικαια.

THUCID. L. iv.

THE SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. RIDGWAY, YORK-STREET, ST. JAMES'S SQUARE.

MDCCLXXXIX.

B 12/5 33.

APOLOGY, &c.

LETTER I.

MY LORD,

I DO not addreſs your lordſhip with a view to polemic correſpondence, for which I have no inclination or leiſure; but in the hope of obtaining information on ſubjects diſtreſſing to my mind, and inconvenient to my circumſtances.

The early years of my life, like thoſe of your lordſhip's, were devoted to literature; as the ſource of fortune and fame. But a ſpirit of enquiry, which in you, has been held by the reins of intereſt; in me, has burſt the boundaries of prudence;—and it has laid waſte my expectations and hopes.

That I do not believe in the articles and doctrines of the Engliſh church, or the authenticity of the revelation on which they are ſaid to be founded, I am diſpoſed to declare. And I wiſh to know why this declaration ſhould excite reſentment, and render me liable to diſadvantages? I will not allege a ſuſpicion generally entertained, that real and actual belief is not neceſſary to ſubſcription, if the habit be induced early. But I ſhould be highly grateful if I could be directed in the mode of ſubſcribing to doubtful or unintelligible propoſitions, without deſtroying the peace of my mind. It has been hinted, that the extremes of credulity and incredulity meet; that atheiſts may appear to be of any opinion, or any ſect, as intereſt or convenience may require; and that men of liberal minds are driven into atheiſm, to obtain that pliability of conſcience ſo expedient in religious eſtabliſhments. If this be true, I am not to hope it will be avowed; or if it were, it would not ſerve me.

Without

Without attempting to corroborate this opinion, from numerous caſes in my own knowledge, I preſume to addreſs to the moſt decent defender of Chriſtianity, my apology for not aſſenting to its pretenſions, and for adhering to the religion of Nature.

I know this liberty will be deemed an offence; that declining the belief and *the advantages* of Chriſtianity, is criminally denominated; and that infidel, and enemy, are ſynonimous terms in the language of bigotry.

I truſt the biſhop of Landaff will deſpiſe ſuch bigotry:—that he will liſten with candor to the reaſons which have determined me to decline powerful patronage, and to prefer anxious and laborious induſtry, to affluence procured by inſincerity:—that he will concur with the efforts of philoſophy to deſtroy the deſpotiſm opinion; and to procure in religion, as in ſcience, the unlimited power of choice.

That the ſtate ſhould ſupport ſome religion, is a falſe principle, which I ſhall not at this time diſcuſs. If it were true, why attempt it by a mode impracticable and impoſſible; which muſt nip integrity in the bud, and deprave the moſt valuable tendencies of the human mind? It is not poſſible to expreſs a ſeries of propoſitions to which the varying faculties of men can yield the ſame aſſent; and to offer recompence for belief, is the expedient of error and impoſture. Every purpoſe of authority, every view of venality might be ſecured, without this *waſte of intellectual delicacy*, and *proſtitution of moral honor*.

If the articles of the church, and the doctrines of revelation cannot ſupport their credit without the aid of mercenaries, why not render the conditions of their ſervices practicable? It is practicable to yield any ſpecies of external obedience;—it is not poſſible to regulate by authority, the real aſſent of the mind. The clergy might be confined to modes, and articles of inſtruction, without being induced, by previous ſubſcrip-

ſubſcription, to deſtroy their hopes, or to violate their integrity.

It is ſaid, the habit of ſubſcribing, like that of cuſtom-houſe oaths, leaves no vicious traces on the mind. If this were avowed, it would not relieve me; for I have not the habit. I ſubſcribe a propoſition, as I ſign a bond; and I have no expedient to evade its meaning.

I am unwilling to aſcribe this opinion to the moſt reſpectable ſcholars of the preſent clergy; and yet in their converſation and ſermons, they are more the diſciples of Xenophon and Seneca, than of Calvin or Cranmer, of Moſes or of Jeſus.

I have peruſed with attention your lordſhip's works; and have heard ſome of your public diſcourſes. You profeſs yourſelf an Engliſh clergyman; but never allude to the doctrine of the Engliſh articles; and *prima facie*, I ſhould adjudge you, and the majority of the holy bench, to be Arminian. And yet a conſcientious Arminian cannot ſubſcribe the thirty-nine articles.

If you would furniſh me with the clue to develope theſe intricate inconſiſtencies, it would lead me further; it would enable a Theiſt to paſs the ordeal without injury, and to preach morality under holy ſanctions; with the holy privilege of appropriating to himſelf large portions of the fruits of induſtry.

The uſage of antiquity in *eſoteric* and *exoteric* doctrines was intelligible; and perfectly conſiſtent with honour and integrity. Private opinions were adopted by choice; public uſages from policy: but no oaths or declarations were extorted on the philoſophic and moral truths of thoſe uſages; and obedience to the abſurdities of public authority, was conſiſtent with that delicacy of private honor which is the happineſs of philoſophic minds. In the modern method, of adding ſubſcription to obedience, reſpecting the metaphyſics of theology, I ſee no aſylum for integrity, from the confines of Calviniſm, to thoſe of licentious and unprincipled Atheiſm.

This,

This, however, I offer only as an opinion; and it may be owing to the weakneſs of my viſual organs: or there may be noſtrums in religion as in medicine, to correct the impurities of moral habits. I know your predilection for a medical noſtrum; it had ſome influence on my determination to take it: and though I would avoid the imputation of *the diſeaſe* for which it is celebrated, even in the pious receſſes of an univerſity; of the evils of which I have no experience: I am grateful for a portion of life it has reſcued from an alarming and hopeleſs diſorder. If you will point out to me *an intellectual ſyrup* of equal efficacy with the *vegetable of De Velnos*, I will riſk the impurity of ſubſcription; the evening of my life may paſs in literary eaſe and ſatisfaction; and I will hail you to my laſt moment as my guide and benefactor.

If this be not practicable, let me intereſt your juſtice and humanity in diſcountenancing the rancor and malignity with which infidelity is treated.

And what are the pretences?

If you would furniſh me with the clue to develope theſe intricate inconſiſtencies, it would lead me further; it would enable a Theiſt to paſs the ordeal without injury, and to preach morality under holy ſanctions; with the holy privilege of appropriating to himſelf large portions of the fruits of induſtry.

The uſage of antiquity in *eſoteric* and *exoteric* doctrines was intelligible; and perfectly conſiſtent with honour and integrity. Private opinions were adopted by choice; public uſages from policy: but no oaths or declarations were extorted on the philoſophic and moral truths of thoſe uſages; and obedience to the abſurdities of public authority, was conſiſtent with that delicacy of private honor which is the happineſs of philoſophic minds. In the modern method, of adding ſubſcription to obedience, reſpecting the metaphyſics of theology, I ſee no aſylum for integrity, from the confines of Calviniſm, to thoſe of licentious and unprincipled Atheiſm.

This,

This, however, I offer only as an opinion; and it may be owing to the weakneſs of my viſual organs: or there may be noſtrums in religion as in medicine, to correct the impurities of moral habits. I know your predilection for a medical noſtrum; it had ſome influence on my determination to take it: and though I would avoid the imputation of *the diſeaſe* for which it is celebrated, even in the pious receſſes of an univerſity; of the evils of which I have no experience: I am grateful for a portion of life it has reſcued from an alarming and hopeleſs diſorder. If you will point out to me *an intellectual ſyrup* of equal efficacy with the *vegetable of De Velnos*, I will riſk the impurity of ſubſcription; the evening of my life may paſs in literary eaſe and ſatisfaction; and I will hail you to my laſt moment as my guide and benefactor.

If this be not practicable, let me intereſt your juſtice and humanity in diſcountenancing the rancor and malignity with which infidelity is treated.

And what are the pretences?

Have the doubts and arguments of unbelievers any tendency to unſettle, or change the opinions of the common people, who are the ſheep of religious eſtabliſhments, and whoſe fleeces are the objects of concern? Nothing can be more improbable; for the common people never read the productions of unbelievers.

Is it to be ſuppoſed that the zealots of religion are unwilling to enter the kingdom of Heaven, unleſs its glories and advantages *be participated* by converted infidels? This is not warranted by the ſpirit and language of religioniſts:—on the common principle of avarice, they ſeize the ſlighteſt pretences to exclude others from heaven; but it is attended with a ſpecies of malignity peculiar to religious minds: for it is in religion alone that malignity adds hatred to misfortune, and puniſhes men for declining high diſtinctions and everlaſting pleaſures.—I have been often accoſted—

BIGOT.

Sir,—you have no religion!

AUTHOR.

AUTHOR.

In your ſenſe of the word perhaps I have none.

BIGOT.

What not believe in revelation?

AUTHOR.

Suppoſe I do not?

BIGOT.

You will be damned eternally!

AUTHOR.

Do you imagine I can believe what appears to be an impoſture?

BIGOT.

No.

AUTHOR.

And do you ſuppoſe there is a power in the univerſe that will condemn me to everlaſting miſery, for honeſtly obeying the dictates of my mind?

BIGOT.

Can you be honeſt and be an infidel?

AUTHOR.

There are no temptations to diſhoneſty in infidelity; there are many in all profeſſions of faith.

BIGOT.

There is an almighty power which will condemn you for unbelief.

AUTHOR.

That power, I ſuppoſe, you call the devil.

BIGOT.

No—I call him God!

AUTHOR.

Call him what you pleaſe; his ſpirit muſt be that of malignity:--and I neither fear nor love him.

BIGOT.

Oh—you are an Atheiſt!

AUTHOR.

No holy falſehood, if you pleaſe:—you are much nearer Atheiſm than I am.

BIGOT.

I believe in God, Chriſt, the holy ghoſt, the ſcriptures, the articles of the church; and I am aſſured, in conſequence, of everlaſting life.

AUTHOR.

I wiſh you happy in the enjoyment of it.—I am not ſo fortunate in my belief and expectation.

BIGOT.

BIGOT.

I abhor you—and hope to ſee you puniſhed.

AUTHOR.

Do you not think me ſufficiently puniſhed in the loſs of Heaven; and of your company there?

BIGOT.

I would have you taſte the torments of Hell here!

AUTHOR.

Why?—Will not the hope of my endleſs miſery *gratify* you?—Beſides, by my abſence, there will be the more room for you in heaven.

BIGOT.

You talk profanely.

AUTHOR.

I talk intelligibly.

BIGOT.

You do not conſider the immenſe rewards of religious faith.

AUTHOR.

I have conſidered them with the anxious impartiality. I have often conſi-

dered the beauty and value of your eſtate: but thoſe circumſtances do not perſuade me it is mine; nor do you ſeem ſolicitous I ſhould have that perſuaſion.

BIGOT.

No—that is another matter.

AUTHOR.

I think it exactly ſimilar; and I deſire you will divide your eſtate with me, for *believing* it is mine.

BIGOT.

Bút you do not believe it.

AUTHOR.

And are you angry with me for not believing it?

BIGOT.

No.

AUTHOR.

And why, for not believing in the promiſes of revelation? They are not ſo dear to you, I perceive, as your eſtate.

BIGOT.

You are miſtaken.

AUTHOR.

When you explain why you will not divide your property with me, on a profeſ-

ſion

ſion of belief—I will excuſe your hatred for *declining to participate your eſtates* in heaven.

I thus, frequently, repel the fury of uncharitable zeal; but the motives, properties, and ingredients, of ſpiritual malice, I never could ſatisfactorily analize; and I recommend them to your penetration.

I have the honor to be,
My Lord,
Your Lordſhip's moſt obedient,
And moſt humble ſervant,
THE AUTHOR.

LETTER II.

MY LORD,

I WILL not detain you on the ſubjects of hiſtoric evidence and miraculous powers; they have been treated by writers of ſplendid abilities: and they have never been propoſed with ſufficient artifice to leave a doubt on my mind.

I have heſitated only on the expediency of penitence; on the conſolations of revelation in old age; and on the hopes of immortality.

I will conſider theſe ſubjects ſeparately, and at large. If my mind ſhould incline to a determination unfavorable to my intereſt, you may pity my ſuppoſed error; but you cannot treat me with paſſion and reſentment. There may be numbers of inferior zealots who will eargerly diſcharge againſt me, the ſanctified offices of rancor and calumny.

The common doctrine of penitence, implying recovery to a ſtate of virtue, has ſome

ſome foundation in nature. The advantage taken of ſorrow and miſery in the unfortunate, to extort confeſſions and atonements is, by ſome perſons, referred to the authority of God; by others, to that artifice which affords ſupport, and is the ſource of riches and honors to a ſacred profeſſion.

Atonements to an almighty and indefinite being, are the genuine effects of ſuperſtition. It ſeems difficult to conceive they can be accepted; as it muſt be impoſſible either to injure or offend him. Men are elevated above reſentment as they improve in wiſdom, and diſcern the cauſes of errors in thoſe around them. Regret and pity are the emotions we feel; and we are ſometimes the more attached to an imperfect being, when errors are foils to its excellencies; and when we are warmly actuated by compaſſion.

Men of virtuous and tender minds, are involved in inconveniences on theſe accounts. They reſt their hopes of aſſiſting thoſe in error, on inſufficient ground;--not from

from want of judgment, but from extreme humanity. Men of harſh and uncomplying diſpoſitions, ſhun the faulty and unhappy;—not from virtue, but from inhumanity. It is true, inſtances may be produced, where thoſe who have aſſociated with the unfortunate and criminal, have been ſeduced and corrupted. Preciſe and unfeeling perſons point them out as warnings; or more ungenerouſly as proofs, that thoſe who aſſociate with the vicious, are always vicious themſelves.

In theſe, as in other caſes, we may diſcern the fallacy of general maxims; one of which is, 'a man may be known by 'his company.' As it would be ridiculous to declare a man poor, becauſe he is often in the habitations of poverty; ſo it would be, that he is addicted to the vices of thoſe with whom his humanity may lead to aſſociate, for their aſſiſtance and recovery.

There are not many paſſions ſo faſcinating as this ſpecies of generoſity; and it reconciles us to difficulties which would be

be otherwiſe intolerable. It is flattering to relieve any diſtreſs: hence the charity we ſee commonly and readily practiſed. It is exquiſitely pleaſing to effect the recovery of amiable and excellent minds, involved in miſeries from errors and vices.

In the preſent ſtate of things, and in thoſe meaſures it may render expedient, there is no moral doctrine of greater importance than that of penitence; and it is neceſſary we ſhould judge properly of its nature and foundation. The principles and cuſtoms of the ſocieties in which we live are ſuch, that we cannot eſcape perverſion. Characters appearing perfect, are always fallacious; and they offend the eye of penetration and taſte, from, what an artiſt would call, want of truth and keeping. Their failings are either concealed, connived at, or licenſed. This is the reaſon that generous minds are more inclined to be attached to ſinners than to ſaints; as the obſcure and mean vices of a guarded character, are ſtronger indications

tions of fixed depravity, than the occaſional deviations of lively and paſſionate diſpoſitions.

The general buſineſs of the moraliſt is the boaſted office of Jeſus, 'not to call 'the righteous, but ſinners, to repent-'ance.'

The few perſons who have had the happineſs of a good education, leading, to real knowledge, conſtitutions juſtly organized and diſpoſed; are not ſuſceptible of any deviations which they cannot inſtantly rectify:—thoſe apes of wiſdom, who diſgrace the denomination of philoſophy; whoſe meagre ſtream of knowledge flows only at their mouths, and whoſe memories and hearts have no connection or ſympathy; whoſe freedom conſiſts in ſubſtituting one ſpecies of credulity for another; and whoſe cowardly virtues evaporate in ſecret wiſhes:—theſe, claſs themſelves among the righteous;—and he muſt be a viſionary, either in religion or morality, who would attempt to render them good

for

for any thing:—they are ſplendid weeds in their eſſential properties; and a miracle only, can make them beautiful and uſeful plants.

Perſons in the art and habit of ſheltering meanneſſes or vices, under the veil of regularity and decorum; and the great claſs of hypocrites or pretenders to perfection, are beyond the reach of any meaſures invented by human reaſon; and the religion that would reform them, *would have ſupernatural claims.* They have ſerved their time to a kind of myſtery, and they will not relinquiſh its profits and advantages. It is with ſinners, honeſt and acknowledged ſinners, that we have hopes of ſucceſs; and it is here only, the efficacy of all doctrines reſpecting penitence and reformation, can be aſcertained.

I muſt remove an objection to my phraſeology, 'that I countenance iniquity, 'by declaring an unqualified preference 'of ſinners, to ſaints.' No propoſition can be leſs doubtful than, 'when deceit 'is added to the incidental infirmities

'and

'and vices of human nature, the difficul-
'ties and dangers of our connections are
'doubled; and our diſappointment and
'hatred multiplied.' In the province pleaſure, thoſe unhappy perſons who are degraded by a licentious abuſe of it, beneath any other condition of human beings—how do they obtain ſuch treatment as to render their lives tolerable? By appearing to be what they are,—by being *honeſtly infamous*:—whereas thoſe who cover their ſnares with the ſemblance of virtue, or wear a maſk, to conceal their failings—ſeldom eſcape the deteſtation they deſerve. In this, and every other caſe, plain and open ſinners, are preferable to hypocrites; and *hypocriſy and ſanctity*, in all my knowledge, and in my ſincere opinion, are ſtrictly and accurately ſynonimous.

The queſtion before us, intereſting to the pretentions of revelation is, how thoſe who have erred and become vicious, may recover themſelves and be reformed?

Reaſon

Reaſon owes it birth to the difference of things, agreeable and diſagreeable; and this difference extended to domeſtic, ſocial, and national intereſts, forms the general doctrine of good and evil, on which depend the utility and importance of all rational purſuits. Our becoming behaviour, our happineſs, and our hopes of recovery when perverted, reſt wholly on ability to make the diſtinction with promptitude and accuracy.

The common ſtandards of virtue and vice, are written doctrines and religious ſyſtems; the civil laws of political conſtitutions; and the cuſtoms and manners of nations.

In the difficulties occurring to me, either in the regulation of my own mind, or in the education of my family; if either, or all theſe inſtruments could have effected my purpoſes, nothing ſhort of idiotiſm could have excuſed the adoption of delicate, tedious, and painful proceſſes. But I do not think it *ever poſſible* to ſpecify duties, in written doctrines; and laws, cuſtoms, and

and manners, are arbitrary, contradictory, enigmatical, and obſcure. By referring to ſuch ſtandards, men are in the condition of machines which compute time, not by organization and excellence of ſtructure, but by the power of arbitrary and external inſtruments.

I have obſerved, young men who ordered their diſpoſitions, by any rules out of themſelves, never became virtuous; many of them fulfilled preſcribed conditions, from ſelfiſhneſs or fear; and a ſpecies of ſatisfaction aroſe from it: but it ſeemed very different from the pleaſure of thoſe who rendered virtue the natural and ſpontaneous exerciſe of their powers. The former were never clear of ſome tincture of hypocriſy; and were always mercenary and ſelfiſh. When we take our meaſures from the will or command of another, or from ſpecified precepts, cuſtoms, and laws, our care is to perform juſt what is neceſſary to approve our obedience, and ſecure our views. In this manner men may be religious, to the utmoſt degree required

required by any ſyſtem, and not to be poſſeſſed of virtue; or they may be loyal citizens, by the laws and cuſtoms of particular countries, without any degree of goodneſs. In all theſe caſes, if we have tranſgreſſed, there are ſpecified atonements; and we practiſe the atonements as we do the duties. But the effect of atonements, is to confirm the diſpoſition to offence; ſometimes to ſink the mind irrecoverably into vice. For if we ſubſtitute the duty of atoning, for that of correcting the diſorders occaſioning deviation; we render thoſe diſorders habitual and inveterate.

We acquire the power of diſtinguiſhing virtue and vice, as we do that of ſeparating wholeſome and unwholeſome food. Superficial obſervers are aſtoniſhed at the prevailing ignorance reſpecting morals; and the abject ſervility with which men ſubmit to the opinions and injunctions of prieſts. If we look into common life, obſerve how much at random men eat and drink, and under the leaſt embarraſſment have

have recourſe to a phyſician, who may be called the prieſt of the body, and who is not of much greater utility than that of the ſoul; we ſhall not wonder they ſubmit to direction in the more complicated, difficult, and important province of morals. If, in the intereſting article of diet, we cannot exert ſo much reaſon, or avail ourſelves of experience, to diſtinguiſh that food, which at the ſame time pleaſes the palate and is conducive to health; can it be matter of aſtoniſhment, in the numerous principles and diſpoſitions which actuate our lives, that we ſhould not always diſtinguiſh thoſe which gratify paſſion, and lead to happineſs? When we ſee common life cleared of phyſicians, and men generally competent to ſeparate food from poiſon; we may look forward with hope that the moral world will be cleared of prieſts, and capable of inſtantaneous and certain determinations on the ſubject of virtue and vice.

The

The doctrine of nature may be ſimply and perſpicuouſly ſtated by the alluſion already uſed. As the man who, by reaſon and experience, readily diſcerns the productions which gratify, as well as nouriſh him, will be healthy; he, who can diſcern the diſpoſitions and actions which give his paſſions the utmoſt exerciſe, while they promote the peace and ſatisfaction of his mind; will certainly be virtuous. On the other hand, as the man whoſe reaſon and experience have not taught him to diſtinguiſh ſalutary nutriment, and who is guided merely by his palate, will ſink into diſeaſe and wretchedneſs; in the ſame manner, he who has not learnt to diſtinguiſh the actions which gratify appetite, while they lead to happineſs, will have no guide but appetite; which on being gratified, may leave him to regret, and miſery. This is the preciſe diſtinction made by reaſon, between the virtuous and the vicious. This muſt be diſcerned and underſtood by every man who would render his diſpoſitions and conduct

the means of happineſs; or would remedy any perverſion and obliquity of his mind. I ſpeak on the authority of nature; whoſe laws are invariable in the intellectual, as in the natural world: and which diſowns all phyſicians or prieſts, either of body or mind. Every man muſt acquire this knowledge, and muſt be able, by the exerciſe of his own underſtanding, not that of another, to diſtinguiſh readily and accurately between virtue and vice. In that caſe, every thing in the moral world is poſſible; we may proceed ſatisfactorily in the road to happineſs; or, if miſled, we may recover it.

I have the honor to be,
My Lord,
Your moſt obedient
And humble ſervant,
THE AUTHOR.

LETTER III.

MY LORD,

THE common language of penitence is, 'I am ſo wretched in conſequence of 'my faults, my own mind is ſo much a 'ſtranger to tranquility; in the commiſ-'ſion and enjoyment of crimes it is ſo 'agitated with apprehenſion or ſickened 'with diſguſt; on diſcovery it is over-'whelmed with ſhame; and on reflection 'tortured with remorſe;—that vice is not 'worth the purſuit: nay, the balance of 'enjoyment muſt be againſt it.' This is the manner in which perſons reaſon, who can reaſon at all. In general, men are terrified by the apprehenſion of penalties, into order or hypocriſy; without acquiring virtuous principles, or taſting virtuous pleaſures. This truth is exhibited in devotees; induſtrious in external ceremonies, or furious in zeal; while their diſpoſitions and tempers remain vicious and deteſtable. They have been aptly denominated

'ſlips of grace, ingrafted on crab trees.' The terrors of hell force them into devout exerciſes; but in the intervals, depraved and malignant paſſions diſcover the principles of their minds. Ingenious men have therefore doubted, that genuine reformation *can be produced by fear of puniſhment*. As this is the motive to repentance, offered by revelation, and in uſe among its votaries; it deſerves our ſerious conſideration.

The fear of puniſhment may certainly produce ſorrow and penitence. Strong apprehenſions of future evils, coinciding with preſent diſtreſs, may force men into a change of conduct; and the ſatisfaction ariſing from the change, may induce them to perſevere a ſufficient time to prevent relapſe. But this is barely within the verge of poſſibility. It has never occurred in my experience; and that experience has been principally in favorable periods of life. Fear, in my knowledge, had only temporary effects: it produced a ſpecies of ſorrow, and occaſioned reſtraint; but

but never influenced the inclination, or habit.

Without ſtating particular caſes, we may take general arguments from three vices, incident to ill-educated youth; and which we may entwine as the poets do the graces—I mean, a diſpoſition to falſehood; to obtain pleaſure by intrigue; and property by ſtealth. Theſe may be called ſiſter deformities, in contraſt to the graces; for they are the genuine offspring of the ſame parents.

Falſehood, intrigue, and a kind of diſhoneſty reſpecting property, very uſual in young perſons; have appeared to originate in the unjuſt reſtraints of poverty, or the injudicious authority of parents and inſtructors. The power of the laws over poverty, or of auſtere parents and tutors over children, may impreſs fear or terror; without materially affecting the vicious diſpoſitions which are gratified by deceit. Their effect is ſimilar to that of dramatic exhibitions; concerning which Ariſtotle ſpoke theoretically, when

he affirmed they purged the ſoul: if he meant by the operation any thing permanently beneficial. The firſt practices of youth, are the firſt efficient leſſons of their education; their firſt ſufferings enure their minds to pain and puniſhment: and they gradually improve in fortitude or callouſneſs, until their virtues or vices be eſtabliſhed in habits. This may account for the riſques they run without apprehenſion; or the celerity with which they recover from circumſtances of ſhame and humiliation.

It is commonly obſerved, the vices of lying, intrigue, and fraud, are incurable. I believe the obſervation owing to erroneous and incompetent remedies. We generally have recourſe to power and terror, which are the ſources of the evils; and if they do not frighten a man out of the vice, and deprive him of the inclination and ſpirit to return, they blunt his ſenſibility, improve his artifice, and ſecure him in its practice.

Numerous

Numerous experiments of this nature have been made in my knowledge, and ſome with a view to impreſs conviction on me. They never ſucceeded. Severity and puniſhment increaſe that meanneſs which is the origin of deceit; induce greater caution in future attempts; and occaſion improvements in the ſecret practice of vice. The beſt accounts I have ever had of patients treated in this manner, implied only the acquiſition of decency in their deviations; the fear of pain or reproach, having given them caution and dexterity in the practice of vice.

You would find it difficult to produce caſes of a different nature, among thoſe who have entered the paths of diſhonor, under the influence of love.

This paſſion, the firſt and beſt in human nature; the moſt pleaſing and powerful incentive to virtue; which leads, almoſt irreſiſtibly, to the great duties of life; ſpreads a charm around them beyond any thing ever imagined of enchantment; draws its lovely hand over the rough brow

of care; and ſooths the anguiſh of poverty, diſappointment, and pain:—this is imprudently watched as an enemy, when firſt it gives ſigns of exiſtence. It is a flame blown up by the breath of God; and if any atrocious folly ſhould be called impiety, it muſt be that of endeavouring to extinguiſh it. The conduct of parents, commonly deemed prudent, is on this occaſion barbarous; and being ſuggeſted by artifice, it naturally generates hypocriſy. To guard the virtue of a child, the ground is deſerted on which alone it can reſt—that of ſincerity and truth. While all coarſe appetites and inſignificant paſſions are acknowledged, this is diſowned; and ſhame or diſhonor are arbitrarily annexed to all its ſymptoms. As nature cannot be ſubdued, and parents are to be obeyed, children are forced into diſſimulation. This is the caſe, particularly with women; and it is the ſource of that artifice, that ſupreme dexterity in fineſſe, and that aſtoniſhing ſpirit of enterprize; which, though

though calculated to parry or to revenge the abandoned profligacy of maſculine cuſtoms; ſubject them to the contempt, ſometimes to the deteſtation, of thoſe perſons who are really diſpoſed to confer happineſs.

When a woman has formed connections promiſing happineſs; if in the habit of artifice and diſſimulation, ſhe will be eaſily drawn aſide, and, at the hazard of her proſpects, indulge trifling and temporary inclinations. The mind is accuſtomed to ſeize its pleaſures by ſtealth, by artifice, by diſſimulation; it is a ſtranger to other means; and has no idea of pleaſures to be obtained in another manner. This perverſion; this life of 'hair-breadth 'ſcapes;' of pleaſures ſuddenly ſnatched in perilous ſituations, and ſucceeded by temporary pains; this concealed and ſtolen ſenſuality, which ſome ſober people conſider with aſtoniſhment, and think unaccountable; is the natural and obvious effect of diſſimulation, the firſt fruit of modern education.

It is owing to this error, that women of the beſt natural diſpoſitions ſacrifice peace of mind, the ſatisfaction and influence of a good name, and the power of diffuſing happineſs extenſively around them; to fleeting and imperfect gratifications, attended with apprehenſion and terror; embittered with remorſe, the loſs of character, influence, and that power ſo flattering and ſo important which diſtinguiſhes the mothers of a happy family.

Theſe truths are extremely intereſting to thoſe who diſcern them in time. If the evils be ſuffered to form habits, I know no remedies for them, natural or ſupernatural.

On the preſent occaſion I ſpeak of women, and not of men; becauſe, in the latter, amorous infidelity ariſes from licentiouſneſs. It is rather a depravity, than a vice; it ranks them with brutes, and not with perverted moral agents: and when accoſted on the ſubject, they reſent or ridicule a violation of their privileges. If it were ſtated to perſons of this deſcription,

tion, that the man who deceives another to obtain his property, is not to be degraded in infamy to a level with him who deceives a woman out of all her happineſs; they would treat it with the contempt of an Indian who ſhould be exhorted not to make exquiſite ſoup of human ſkulls, or to regale and enjoy himſelf on the fleſh and blood of his fellow creatures.

This is the character of a man of pleaſure; whatever may be his appearance and manners. He is more ſavage, for he gives more pain; and occaſions miſery more complicated and exquiſite than the wretches emerging from brutality, and who can only tear and devour the bodies of each other.

Such perſons cannot be recovered. A debauché may run a ſhort career, and ſink, at an early period, into inſignificance and domeſtic order; his appetites being palled, and his conſtitution irreparably injured. While his power of bleſſing, or his capacity of making happy, re-

mains, he is occupied in diffuſing miſery; and when obliged to retire, and to wear the garb of decorum, he vents his ſpleen in ſatires on that part of the world he has offended. I have never ſeen any ground, in ſuch a caſe, on which to reſt a hope of recovery. It ſeems to me as practicable to elevate a Hottentot, confirmed in his habits, into the elegance and delicacy of enlightened ſociety; as to raiſe a debauché into a man of honor, truth, feeling, conſcience, or decency.

We ſhall find ſimilar improbabilities of recovery or amendment, if we attentively obſerve thoſe accuſtomed, in early life, to make free with little articles, the property of others. The ſhame or puniſhment of ſuch tranſgreſſions, at an age when every thing is deemed venial, are only hints for caution and dexterity. Young perſons, therefore, who have had habits of pilfering in infancy, generally continue through life to be diſhoneſt in principle or inclination. The puniſhments of the laws, in ſome caſes of this offence,

offence, are ſo inadequate and tremendous, that perſons of only moderate reſolution, are intimidated into caution, and forced within thoſe bounds which admit of ſecurity.

This is the utmoſt effect of meer puniſhment, or the apprehenſion of puniſhment: for let the liar be tempted by advantage, and aſſured of ſecrecy; let the woman who, in love, has looſened thoſe bands of honor and delicacy which encircle the human heart, be tempted by intereſt, flattery, or paſſion, and be ſecure; let the man who has depraved his opinions of juſtice by little acts of diſhoneſty, have opportunities of appropriating money which cannot be detected: each will obey the ruling and habitual inclination, without an idea of remorſe.

In all religions, ſuppoſed to be ſupernatural, the operation of fear, is improved by an opinion that Almighty God ſees and regiſters every thing for the purpoſes of reward and puniſhment. This would be the moſt uſeful doctrine of modern

dern eſtabliſhments, if ſtated with humanity, and ſuffered to have its effect. But the Deity is uſually characteriſed as an arbitrary relentleſs tyrant; and rewards and puniſhments are not invented with decent regard to probability. To counteract theſe abſurdities, atonements are enjoined, rendering even credulity of little effect. The terrors of hell, as they are commonly uſed, lead the ignorant into forms and ceremonies, which are ſaid to be charms againſt them: they may render a man ſuperſtitious, but cannot furniſh him with virtuous principles, diſpoſitions, or character.

Some moral uſe might have been made of the opinion that the Deity ſees every thing; and thoſe who are deterred from vicious actions only by ſhame, might have been influenced by the conſideration, that ſecrecy reſpecting men, ſecured them only from ſlight diſhonor; and that real infamy awaited them when called by God into a theatre occupied by an aſſembled world; and when a diſcovery of their characters

racters would be made before ſuperior beings. But hypocrites of every ſort; perſons who have perverted into vicious but plauſible habits, the principles of truth, pleaſure, and honeſty, are not to be affected by ſuch conſiderations. The groſs fear of a ſanguinary tyrant, is barely ſufficient to alarm them; and this fear will either be rendered ineffectual by religious palliatives, or it will drive them to deſpair: effects equally unfriendly to all hopes of moral recovery.

I believe this account will bring to your recollection a general idea of the common doctrine of repentance; or the uſual means of amendment and reformation. I have no motive for queſtioning their excellence, but that ariſing from truth; for my intereſt, reputation, and happineſs are embarked in the ſucceſs of meaſures, not in that of diſcuſſions on their nature: and the meaſures I purſue are known and public. Preference from pre-poſſeſſion would, in my caſe, be folly that would correct itſelf; or put an end

to

to my employment. Means, denominated ſupernatural, have, in all the caſes to which I have attended, been ineffectual. The moral patients have been rendered cautious, orderly, decent, and even religious, in the common ſenſe of the word; *but none have been truly reformed.*

I have the honor to be,
My Lord,
Your moſt obedient
And moſt humble ſervant,
THE AUTHOR.

LETTER IV.

MY LORD,

AS it is eaſier to keep a garment unſpotted, than to remedy the effects of negligence; as the body may with leſs ſkill be preſerved in health, than recovered from diſeaſe: ſo the mind, when its powers are properly adjuſted and employed, may proceed in the road of happineſs with eaſe and delight; while it may be difficult, ſometimes impoſſible, to recover it from habits of deviation, or perverted paſſions.

In this buſineſs, I have ever found it neceſſary to direct my attention to the faculty of diſtinguiſhing virtue and vice. It is called ſenſibility; and is apprehended to be given by nature. The conſtruction or organization, on which the ſenſibility is formed, may be furniſhed by nature; but the degrees of truth, preciſion, and delicacy, with which we judge, and

and determine, depend on art and education.

This ſenſibility, this ſentiment of right and wrong, this conſcience, may be ſo juſtly formed as to be the ſure teſt of incidents and actions; or ſo negligently, and be ſo perverted as to be deluſive: or, it may be reſtored, when conſiderably injured. Our attention therefore, ſhould be directed to the power of diſtinguiſhing right and wrong. All ſorrow, previous to the determination of this faculty, is the produce of diſappointment, or of mortification at diſcovery; which has ſeldom any other effect than to render the offender cautious and artful in the commiſſion of future offences.

It muſt be of great importance, that perſons who would recover themſelves, or rectify the diſpoſitions of others, ſhould diſtinguiſh ſorrow forced by diſcovery, from genuine regret excited by a view of unworthy actions, and occaſioned by clear diſcernment of the difference of good and evil.

An

An error, in this ſtage of the proceſs, may be fatal. The effects of ſorrow for an offence, are diſlike of the principle leading to it; and reſolution to renounce its influence. Sorrow for diſcovery, or excited by puniſhment, diſtreſs, and fear, may induce diſlike of the principle, as the occaſion of temporary diſtreſs; but will not prevent its adoption, when it offers ſecret pleaſures or great convenience. This, however, is the paſſion enforced by ſuppoſed revelations, and denominated 'hatred of ſin.' The real effects have ever, appeared to me, either in ſeries of momentary and inſignificant reſolutions, atonements, prayers, and ſuperſtitious practices; or in deſpair of recovery, terminating in deteſtable habits. Penitents of this kind commonly conſign their lives to the gratification of ſpurious and vitiated paſſions; for which they periodically atone, by ſpecified and mechanical forms, geſtures, and operations. This is adding to the inconveniences of vice, thoſe of fictitious diſcipline; whoſe temporary

porary ſatisfaction cannot avail, and which generally produces fruitleſs torment.

Vicious paſſions are like ſprings; in an irregular and diſordered ſtate, they de form the hills that produce them. It is in vain we dam up the currents, when formed; all reſiſtance miſapplied, adds to their force and miſchief: and no good can be done without approaching the ſource. In morals, when the mind becomes erroneous and vitiated; to alarm merely by the miſchiefs it occaſions, or by puniſhment and terror to impede and reſiſt its progreſs, may only add to its impetuoſity. To correct its deviations we muſt have addreſs and reſolution to approach their ſources.

Without recurring to numerous caſes, as authorities of my opinions; we may have inſtances to illuſtrate them, by a ſlight attention to the moſt prevalent and powerful of all paſſions.

The miſery in which women are involved, who deviate from the path of virtue, is aggravated by many circumſtances

ſtances of injuſtice; and the difficulties of their reformation are increaſed, by barbarous prejudices and cuſtoms. They have therefore been objects of compaſſion; and numerous plans have been imagined for their aſſiſtance and relief. Theſe plans may have been ſuggeſted by humanity; and when I diſapprove them, I hope it will not be imagined I would impeach their principle. The wanton cruelty with which women may be ſeduced, rendered the inſtruments of momentary gratification, and abandoned to infamy and miſery, has been long the reproach of civil and religious inſtitutions; and aſſociations to palliate the evil, have been formed by humanity: but humanity, like any other affection, is liable to error. A general ſtate of intelligence, admitting this brutal treatment of women, cannot be expected to deviſe or procure them proper relief.

In all caſes, where real reformation is intended, we muſt comprehend the cauſes of the evil to be removed.

Women

Women are not generally ſunk into infamy by poverty, idleneſs, and neglect of prayers and ſermons. They are ſeduced by artifices, connived at by the laws; which will render ineffectual, any inſtitutions to reform penitents in the paths of love. While we are at liberty to miſlead women, by violations of faith and juſtice which, in the concerns of common property, would be capital offences;—while the injured have no hopes of redreſs, but from the honor and humanity of their ſeducers; while we are invited to licentiouſneſs by inſtitutions to ſhelter infamy--is not that infamy inſured? is not miſery multiplied by the means intended to relieve it? —or is it wonderful, when we have removed poverty, idleneſs, and irreligion, the evil ſhould not be removed?

Here, I think, natural and ſupernatural means are brought into competition.

To reform perſons ſacrificed to love, meaſures of more delicacy and difficulty are required, than thoſe adopted in public inſtitutions.

Plans

Plans lately purſued for the reformation of the vicious, are copies of nunneries and convents; filled by perſons actually impriſoned, or by thoſe who fly the world, becauſe they have not underſtanding and virtue to ſuſtain its diſappointments. But the intentions are different—the end of monaſtic vows being retirement, not reformation for future utility. We are not to wonder, thoſe who have been confined in modern inſtitutions, as the means of recovery, have diſappointed the pious expectations of their benefactors; and that the time conſumed in them, is only a reſpite for irregularity and vice.

Plans of recovery to ſocial virtue, ſhould be executed in *ſociety*. Moral patients ſhould be liable to temptations, but not under the neceſſity of ſubmitting to them. Thoſe who have fallen by artifice, ſhould be inſtructed to guard againſt it; thoſe who have been tempted by poverty, ſhould be initiated in uſeful arts; and thoſe having conſtitutional infirmities and habits of vice, ſhould be taught to counteract them,

and

and to eſtabliſh habits favourable to virtue. All inſtitutions intended to affect principles and manners, ſhould be *perfect communities, on ſmall and accurate plans*; where a juſt police might be eſtabliſhed; where the nature of virtue and vice might be exhibited, not in precepts and declarations, but in facts and occurences; and where every member might be taught that moral calculation, which demonſtrates our intereſt and our pleaſure to be the reſult of order in our paſſions, and virtue in our manners.

If, inſtead of ſeparating the ſexes, the unfortunate devotees of love were mingled; if ſmall communities were formed with ſuitable inſtitutions, if the ſubjects of theſe little ſtates might conſider themſelves as in nurſeries for the general community, and be at liberty to diſcover their diſpoſitions by the choice of employments or by forming connections—numerous benefits would ariſe; and every patient ſuſceptible of recovery, would return into the world with diſpoſitions he might

might retain. By ſeparating the ſexes, we form convents and nunneries; and not being inveloped by deſpair, they become nurſeries of vice. The conſequence of bringing together conſiderable numbers of the ſame ſex, are too notorious to be diſputed. Feeble projectors, and ſuperficial legiſlators, are haſtening into another extreme of abſurdity, and enjoin *ſolitude*; *ever productive of incurable atrocity.* No perſon can be qualified for ſociety, or inſtructed to avoid the errors and follies committed in it, but in inſtitutions which are images of ſociety. Poſterity will therefore adjudge many of the charities; which do honor to our humanity, and are intended to ſerve the intereſts of virtue—as the ſupports of vice. It is aſtoniſhing this truth ſhould not be obvious, while the effects of popular inſtitutions are in the ſcale of the vice it is intended to correct. If the idle and profligate can look forward to an aſylum, under the conſequences of their faults; if they are crowded to produce depraved fermenta-

tion of body and mind; if their hearts are deeply and fatally contaminated—it is not harſh to call theſe inſtitutions, the temples of iniquity.

The doctrine of revelation, reſpecting repentance, is uſually maintained on the propriety of oppoſing one paſſion to another: that of nature, by the neceſſity of ſuſpending the operations of the mind in the purſuits of iniquity, until habits of a contrary tendency can be introduced. The credit of revelation, prevailing over that of reaſon, in prevailing cuſtoms; the offices of reformation are conſigned principally to fear. Hope of reward, and fear of puniſhment, are the ſubſtitutes of reaſon, ſenſibility, and conſcience. And if their objects were at hand, they might ſometimes effect the purpoſes of reformation: they might hold before the mind, images of ſuch force as to deter it from crime; and allow leiſure to form habits of virtue. But theſe are not the great leſſons of wiſdom, in the recovery of miſled or depraved minds. I have ever found them confined

fined and partial, in their effects; they have weakened and debaſed the ſpirit, whoſe habits and actions they apparently reformed; and they furniſhed the artful, with occaſions of complicated and perplexing impoſture.

Virtue and happineſs are the reſult of order and harmony in our affections: and they render us uſeful in all ſituations. The effect of hopes and fears may poſſibly be utility; but neceſſarily it is obedience. The diſtinction is extremely important to a virtuous character; and to the happineſs of the human mind. The intereſt occaſioned by the exerciſe of our reaſon and affections, is different from that which may be created by hopes of reward, and fears of puniſhment; whether ſpecified by God or man:—the former lead the mind to virtue, by actual inveſtigation and conviction of utility; the latter, to obedience, regularity, or ſuperſtition; and may leave it deſtitute of goodneſs.

Rewards and puniſhments may ſerve the purpoſes of government, in reſtraining exceſſes incident to ſociety. The power of diſtinguiſhing right and wrong; of diſcerning utility and happineſs; or of rectifying errors in ſentiments and diſpoſitions; are not ſuſceptible of advantage from any ſpecies of religion hitherto exhibited with pretenſions of being revealed: it is acquired in the manner of every other faculty; and it is poſſeſſed in proportion to our rank in the ſcale of intellectual exiſtence.

Every being ſeems endowed with the power of diſcerning its path: and when driven out, has generally that of recovery. Man, far from being precluded the privilege, poſſeſſes it eminently; and in all moral caſes, has hardly ever occaſion to go out of himſelf, for information and aſſiſtance.

Having the faculty of diſcerning real and permanent intereſts, the paſſions and habits of purſuing them, are in our power.

power. When vicious tendencies have perverted our manners, we may eſtimate their ſtrength, and allot proper time for their correction. This, in all caſes, is poſſible; and generally practicable. We can abſtain from pleaſures the moſt exquiſite, for a ſhort time; and if for any time, for ever. Vicious characters may therefore be reformed, without the miraculous aid of heaven; if the diſpoſitions be ſeparated, and in every caſe ſufficient time allotted for abſtinence, reſiſtance, and regulation. By reſiſting anger, a habit of mildneſs and patience may take place; by repreſſing irregular paſſions, moderate love of pleaſure may be cheriſhed; and every vice may be induced to yield to its oppoſite virtue.

The antients practiſed this method of regulating their minds. They had periods of ſelf-examination; their diſpoſitions were under the eye of reaſon; and when they erred, it was the office

of reaſon, not of authority or paſſion, to rectify them.

I am, my Lord,
Your obedient,
And very humble ſervant,
THE AUTHOR.

OLD AGE.

LETTER V.

Habet ſenectutem, honorate præſertim, tantam auctoritatem, ut ea pluris ſit, quam omnes adolocentiæ voluptates.

CIC. SENECT. S. 17.

MY LORD,

AMONG the inducements to adopt revelation, none are more frequently uſed, than the conſolation and ſupport furniſhed by it in old age. They have been repeatedly urged on me; and I ſo much reſpect the characters and principles from which they originate, that I ſhall conſider the reaſonable ſources of pleaſure in the decline of life. If thoſe of revelation ſhould deſerve preference, I will readily adopt them.

Old age is a ſeaſon to which all men direct their views. It is the common

policy of education to hold up its inconveniencies to youth; and to inforce principles which may alleviate or prevent them. I am not convinced of the utility of referring to the decline of life at this ſeaſon; and when the ſubject has occurred in my own family, I have not ſtated the forms and obſervances of ſupernatural religion among the cauſes rendering it deſirable.

There is a ſummary method of determining the ſentiments with which we are to regard the approach of age.

It is ſaid, 'The character of the Divine 'Being is ſupremely benevolent; all his 'appointments are good; and old age, 'being his appointment, muſt be a bleſ-'ſing.' But if it be admitted there are cauſes which, in indefinite inſtances, defeat ſuch appointment, this ſpecies of piety will not be a ſufficient ſupport; and we may be as wretched on being deprived of happineſs, as if we had no ſuch opinion of providence.

We

We are obliged to take the operations of nature in detail; and we can aſcertain or comprehend only a ſmall number of facts on any ſubject. The government of the world, in its general departments, offers to the human mind objects too large, too indefinite; and attempts to reconcile good and evil in it, even by able philoſophers, have generally been ridiculous.

If, in the conſtitution of this government, it be intended that old age ſhall be reſpectable and happy, where are the proviſions to render the decay and decompoſition of the human body inſenſible or pleaſing? Why is the loſs of bodily ſtrength, or mental ability, attended with contempt? Why is old age generally deemed a misfortune? And why ſhould laws and cuſtoms be deliberately inſtituted to put old people to death? In every ſituation, of which we have any knowledge, the duty, or virtue, has a reward or prize. The perplexing circumſtance is, that rewards of this kind ſhould be obtained

ſo precariouſly, and with ſo much difficulty, as to render any intention in nature queſtionable. It is probable, no moral happineſs could be produced without this difficulty or uncertainty. We ſhould have little ſatisfaction in virtue, without experience or knowledge of the vice to which it is oppoſed: and wiſdom would not be an object of admiration; the advantage and happineſs attending it would not be perceived; without being contraſted with folly. Public prudence, and public virtue, are the reſult of all poſſible experiments in imprudence and vice. The diſpoſitions of nature conſiſt of aptitudes, fitneſſes, or affinities, which we are to diſcover, put together, or combine; and we generally try every wrong method, before we adjuſt our determination and intereſt. Hence the introduction, nay, the utility and neceſſity of evil in the adminiſtration of the world; and hence the variety and oppoſition of principles and

cuſtoms

cuſtoms eſtabliſhed under general pretenſions of public happineſs.

We are obliged to conſider old age as approaching us under various circumſtances; ſome of which may render it pleaſing, others unpleaſing: and theſe circumſtances are independent of extraneous and arbitrary principles, whether denominated human or divine.

In ſocieties ſubſiſting on depredation, where bodily ſtrength and agility are the circumſtances of importance, men become uſeleſs and burthenſome in the decline of life. Such communities cannot admit the full exerciſe of the beſt affections. Children will not regard their parents with gratitude, as the cauſes of exiſtence they do not find a bleſſing. Hardly any reciprocal offices take place to bind the young to the aged. When the ſavage hord is meditating miſchievous expeditions, the ſtrength and agility of thoſe advancing to the decline of life, are tried; they are made to climb trees, or to get

on their branches, which are ſhaken with violence; every wretch who falls is unfit for the expedition, uſeleſs to the community, and put to death.

In other caſes they have not recourſe to this ſpecies of trial, but determine ſummarily, on the fate of thoſe who are evidently unable to accompany them.

Theſe proceedings, however ſhocking to our feelings, ſeem to be conſequences of particular ſituations. Tribes, who cannot provide fixed and convenient habitations, by the ordinary exertion of policy and ſtrength, and who may be unable to ſupport or convey aged perſons on hazardous expeditions, are reduced to the neceſſity of ſuppreſſing affectionate ſuggeſtions which would ariſe in better ſituations; or rather, to ſubſtitute one kind of tenderneſs for another. Conſigning them to famine, to the fury of their enemies, or to be torn by wild beaſts, is cruelty; and humanity, in their morals, is putting them to death.

The

The infirmities of age, and the diſeaſes and miſeries attending it, in rude and ill-contrived communities, are reaſons for committing this violence; or ſhewing this ſpecies of humanity.

In theſe ſituations, what doctrines, natural or ſupernatural, can render old age a bleſſing; if old age were permitted to take place? The perſuaſion of the community muſt be, that it is an evil; and the philoſophy of the people conſiſt in reconciling their minds to a violent prevention. This philoſophy has not operated in reconciling the aged to death. We find, in all caſes, the act is commited by the young:—it would be leſs offenſive to nature; it would aſſume the appearance of moral merit if inflicted by themſelves; if their death were in compliance with an eſtabliſhed law, and on the deliberate conviction of inutility. The conſiderations which ſuppreſs all appearances of regret or indignation at the determination to deſtroy them, would highly gratify a philoſophic mind. We

do

do not find ſuch determinations produce repinings or reſiſtance. We muſt imagine death, not attended with diſhonor: and that the ſame minds which ſuggeſt ſufficient reaſons for their own ſupport under excruciating pains; which can apparently diſregard torture; and even provoke and ſtimulate the malignity of executioners; have ſome mode of placing the ſacrifice of old men in a light inducing acquieſcence. I uſe the word acquieſcence, becauſe, if the ſentiments of nature could be completely ſuppreſſed, by cuſtom or neceſſity, and men be fully ſatisfied with ſuch ſituations; no efforts would be made to exchange them for others, where life may be extended in ſecurity to its utmoſt verge, and where talents ſuited to all its ſeaſons may be exerciſed.

Slightly, as we may imagine, the affections to be excited in rude ſocieties; it muſt be impoſſible men ſhould be propagated, children and youth brought up, live contiguouſly, obſerve the ſame cuſtoms,

toms, and co-operate in neceſſary or miſchievous expeditions;—without ſocial affections. Little as we may ſuppoſe the benefit of life or education in ſuch caſes —is it imaginable, a ſon can approach without emotion, a father and a mother, to do the terrible office of neceſſary humanity, by plunging his javelin in their boſoms? Can it be ſuppoſed a man, who has received kindneſs in difficulty; has been ſaved from the fury of an enemy, or from the fangs of a wild beaſt, by the interpoſition of an older and more experienced neighbor; would do the laſt office of violence on him, without anguiſh? For theſe duties, being neceſſary acts of humanity, devolve on children or friends; as being moſt intereſted in their execution. Perſons ſlightly connected with the aged, would have only ſlight apprehenſions concerning their fate: and leave them to its chance with indifference. Tenderneſs and affection feel theſe apprehenſions in their utmoſt force; and the beſt children, or the beſt friends, may poſſibly be the

moſt

moſt ready and impetuous to diſcharge the horrible duty.

The voice of nature is here heard in awful diſſonance. A child preſenting himſelf to his parent; a friend to his friend; for this ſhocking, but compaſſionate office—are ſituations beyond the power of eloquent deſcription. And the diſtreſs and miſery; we may ſuppoſe the reaſons, that ſavages have made efforts to form ſettled ſocieties, and to invent the rude principles of policy.

In improved circumſtances, old people are preſerved; becauſe their preſervation is conſiſtent with the ſecurity and intereſt of the ſtate. Where contrivance, prudence, and wiſdom, are aſſociated with ſtrength; and the ſociety has a fixed reſidence, old perſons are reſpected; in the councils and deliberations of ſettled tribes, old men hold the firſt ranks, and are deemed of great importance. Reaſon appears in its dawn; and, though ſhining through a miſty and offenſive atmoſphere, it promiſes a ſplendid and glorious day.

Deſigns

Deſigns formed on the firſt ſuggeſtions of nature, are rudely ſketched; but though executed with abſurdity and folly, they bear the marks of their origin. Political conſtitutions, in nations barely ſettled, are on plans ſo natural and ſimple; ſo well calculated for the general intereſt, and the enjoyment of perſonal happineſs, that writers of lively imaginations have rendered it problematical, whether the life of a ſavage be not preferable to that of a citizen in any civilized ſtate. The outlines of all the boaſted conſtitutions exiſting, are taken from plans conceived in woods: and it is ſuppoſed, pretended improvements are owing to error and artifice, rather than wiſdom or public virtue.

In theſe circumſtances, the ſeaſons of human life, and the duties ariſing from them, are barely but diſtinctly marked. The old man takes his place, in the rank pointed out by his utility. Strength and agility being exhauſted; and youth having furniſhed experience; he contrives meaſures

measures he has not force to execute; controls the ardor of youthful imaginations; remedies the effects of passionate indiscretions; adjudges the rewards of valor and virtue; and directs the springs which actuate the state.

Here age assumes a venerable and pleasing aspect: and if its duties were confined within the limits of its country, but little disgust would mingle with serene and real pleasures. I mean, the internal regulations of savage communities, with so much civil policy as to produce public order, and so much knowledge of necessary arts, as to procure the means of subsistence; are so calculated for general happiness, that old men, as legislators and magistrates, would be in situations most respectable and pleasing, if states were not in wretched barbarism respecting each other; actuated by depraved passions, and avowing motives of cruelty and devastation, to which the human heart, in cool and deliberate moments, can never be reconciled. The minds of youth, are seas agitated by storms,

where

where miſchiefs and misfortunes make ſlight or tranſient impreſſions; but thoſe of old men are calm; and violent or cruel paſſions cannot conſtitute their pleaſure. They may preſide in aſſemblies where enemies are tortured; they may direct the hand of infancy to deeds of inhumanity: theſe are effects of policy, aided by habits of vindictiveneſs in circumſtances of peril and deſperation.

In communities thus conſtructed, old men enjoy the reward of their virtues, by being advanced to ſituations, where experience and wiſdom are of public utility. Old age, therefore, is ſo far from requiring ſupernatural aſſiſtances; ſo far from being diſagreeable or undeſirable, that it ſeems to be a calm and delightful ſeaſon. The tumultuous ardor of great paſſions, is exhauſted in tumultuous gratification; the intenſe heats of a ſplendid day have ſubſided: and calm evening ſucceeds, more favorable to reflection and contemplation; the principal miniſters of human happineſs. It is in the recollection

tion of moral actions, and not always in the performance, that we perceive their value. Hence the general diſpoſition of age to refer to paſt tranſactions; to avoid preſent circumſtances; to reſiſt preſent impreſſions; and to live by reflection.

This condition of human ſocieties, as it is favourable to the internal happineſs of particular ſtates, is ſtrictly juſt to the rights of age. Old men take the rank aſſigned by the public intereſt; they preſide in the councils of the community they had ſerved in youth; and they foſter, regulate, and reward in their offspring, thoſe paſſions and virtues they have experienced and exerciſed. It is the ſpirit, actuating petty ſtates towards each other, that prevents them from being happy; and allotting to the orders compoſing them, their reſpective duties and pleaſures. Old age, occupying the ſeats of wiſdom, and adminiſtring the rewards of virtue, need not ſolicit heaven to ſupply its ſatisfactions: it is uſeful and deſirable, as the autumn of a fruitful year.

The

The public paſſions being perfidious, vindictive, and cruel; all happineſs is tainted; and the pleaſures of age ſuffer mortifying diminutions.

Evils of this kind are not meliorated by ſuperſtition; or by the fables of any mythology. They force men to vary and improve the conſtruction of ſocieties: and if we trace their progreſſions, we ſhall find that the ſupport and ſatisfaction of old age, are founded on the *actions*, not the *opinions*, of early life.

I am, My Lord,
Your obedient,
And moſt humble ſervant,
THE AUTHOR.

OLD AGE.

LETTER VI.

Aptiſſima omnino ſunt, Scipio & Læli, arma ſenectutis, artes, exercitationeſque virtutem: quæ in omni ætate cultæ, cum multum diuque vixeris, mirificos efferunt fructus; non ſolum quia numquam deſerunt, ne in extremo quidem tempore ætatis (quamquam id maximum eſt) verum etiam quia conſcientia bene actæ vitæ, multorum beneſactorum recordatio jucundeſſima eſt.

CIC. DE SENECT. S. 3.

MY LORD,

I HAVE conſidered the principal circumſtances, affecting old age, in ſavage communities. Events producing diſtinctions of rank, are obvious in the hiſtories of Greece and Rome. Old men were honored; advanced in councils; and influenced ſenates, in proportion to the wiſdom and excellence of political and civil inſtitutions. The governments of Greece and Rome, produced morals of a pure and

and exalted ſpecies; and the rewards of wiſdom and virtue were allotted in age, by their prudent and equitable arrangements.

In the incidents producing the preſent condition of Europe, the progreſs of knowledge and civilization has not been gradual. Nations of great ſimplicity in manners and policy, invaded the dominions of enervated neighbors; to revenge injuries, or to improve their condition. To ſecure dominions ſuddenly acquired, they exchanged ſimple and equitable arrangements, for complicated ſyſtems, denominated feodal; plauſible at their inſtitution, but the ſources of enormous calamities. The military ſpirit predominated; and occaſioned the exceſſes which ever follow the dominion of violence and force. By the vices of theſe inſtitutions, the ſtates of Europe ſunk into a condition of barbariſm and wretchedneſs, more deplorable than that of ſavages approaching neareſt to brutes, and whoſe miſeries have hardly forced them within

within the faint outlines of civil policy. The period denominated, the middle age, when the principles of Gothic ſyſtems were exhibited in their utmoſt malignity, involved men in calamities more complicated and deplorable, than could be experienced by ſavages, ſuppoſed to be deſtitute of civil government. For they blended the ferocity of brutal manners, with ſome knowlege of the military art, and of the diſcipline of the conquered ſtates.

In theſe periods, old age partook largely of the general miſeries. The perpetual clangor of arms, is very unſuitable to the quietneſs and peace ſo neceſſary in the decline of life; and the ſcenes of devaſtation and horror continually exhibited, kept the minds, of the weak and infirm, in alarming anxiety. The neceſſity of perſonal ſtrength and valor, not only to acquire fame and glory, but to obtain ſecurity in the common intercourſes of a violent life, drew the general attention to thoſe qualities; and age ſunk into oblivion under its infirmities and pains. The recol-

recollection of years, ſpent in ſanguinary actions, was not calculated for ſatisfaction; if not occaſionally chequered with thoſe beneficent exploits, by which female innocence was protected, or female honor avenged. Here ſupernatural aſſiſtances ſhould have diſplayed their force; for they were acknowledged with implicit credulity. Superſtition amuſed the leiſure of wretched infirmity; but did not afford it conſolation and ſupport. Romances, the beſt records of thoſe times, point out age as the ſeaſon of regret. The aged, having loſt the qualities, contributing to general intereſt and utility, mourned their inſignificance, and pined in diſcontent.

If they reſerved ſufficient ſtrength for atonements, by ſpecified rites and ſtipulated ſacrifices of property, religion became the active and powerful inſtrument of villainy; *for all religious atonements, are indirectly the motives of vice.*

The political regulations prevailing in Europe, when the northern nations took poſſeſſion of it, have had effects on go-

vernments and morals, which may never be removed. Military honors, and the civil duties required, were annexed to the poſſeſſion of property: and the poſſeſſor of a certain eſtate, whatever his age, capacity, or diſpoſition, appeared in the firſt order of military leaders, or ſuſtained an important part in national deliberations and councils. This introduced into the ſcience of government, principles the moſt abſurd and injurious. It rendered property the ſubſtitute of public talents; enſlaved wiſdom to folly, and virtue to vice. The fatal effects of theſe principles, are obſervable in all the councils and meaſures of modern ſtates. Where democratic turbulence has burſt the bounds of oppreſſion, a ſpecies of compromiſe has taken place, and motley bodies have been formed, of old men and boys: the duties of action and deliberation are not properly ſeparated; while youth is throwing out its crude thoughts in aſſemblies, improperly called *Senates*; age is wielding the public ſword with feeble and trembling hands.

Theſe

Theſe are among the inveterate and innumerable evils introduced by the regulations of foedal ſyſtems.

But though the privileges and bleſſings of age be not ſo conſiderable; though the enthuſiaſm of its reflected pleaſure be not ſo noble, as in ſituations to adviſe and direct the general proſperity; in the wide field of enjoyment, which high civilization procures, many of the rights of wiſdom and virtue may be introduced.

Here we muſt conſider the condition of old people, as connected with individuals, or with private families. So ſmall a portion of their ſatisfaction ariſes from public cauſes, that it hardly deſerves an eſtimate. But the liberty of cultivating private and domeſtic virtues is ſo great, that we deplore not the loſs of other privileges; unleſs awakened into recollection by public danger or diſtreſs.

Old men, in our families and acquaintance, perform the duties which ſhould be aſſigned them in the ſtates: they give counſel; check the imprudence, or direct the

paſſions of youth: and the reſpect and happineſs they enjoy, are in proportion to the wiſdom they have acquired, or to the activity and extent of their virtues. The proſpect of age, therefore, has no circumſtances, to be held out, as objects of terror. In age, as in every period, the uſe of reaſon, and the duties of goodneſs alone, can ſecure happineſs. This truth is taught in all ſocieties; and is to be deduced from the leſſons of nature. If we neglect it, we muſt take the conſequences: for in the moral world, we can eat only of thoſe fruits we have planted.

The objections to age are,

It deprives us of bodily activity and ſtrength; and ſuppreſſes paſſions and faculties, the ſources of enjoyment.

The infirmities and diſeaſes incident to it, embitter thoſe loſſes:

And it holds before us, the near proſpect of death.

In gradually depriving us of bodily force, abating the power of our faculties, or the ardor of our paſſions, it has the effect

effect of autumn and winter; that of contraſt to the fervor of an active ſummer. It is in life, as in the year:—if we underſtand the ſeaſons, and properly uſe them, we enjoy their ſucceſſion; if not, we perpetually regret their changes: in ſummer wiſhing for winter, and in winter for ſummer. They who know not the uſe of ſeaſons in life, are tormented with deſires to quit preſent ſituations, whether of youth or age.

Geographers obſerve, by the form and motion of the globe, all its inhabitants have nearly equal quantities of light and heat. All ſituations and periods of life, are ſuſceptible of nearly equal enjoyment. Poverty and riches, power and ſubjection, youth and age, differ rather in the nature, than in the quantity of their pleaſures and pains. It is unphiloſophical, unjuſt, and imprudent, to conſign this life to youth, and to *refer age to another* for ſupport and conſolation. Youth and age are placed at oppoſite extremities of the ſame ſcene; and advantageouſly influence each other

This influence is deſtroyed, by turning the views, and directing the deſires of the aged to futurity.

Without aid from ſuperſtition, if it were capable of affording aid; without reference to another and uncertain ſtate—the advantages of age may bear compariſon with thoſe of youth. A ſtate of reflection, provided we have done well, may be as favorable to enjoyment, as the hurry of action. The ſportſman, retired to his hall, and recording the incidents of the chace, feels a pleaſure as great as when engaged in producing them. An old man, reflecting on virtuous actions; free from the agitations of uncertainty, hope, and the numerous paſſions attending actual engagements; is in a ſtate of mind, not to be deſpiſed by youth.

The connections of friendſhip continue to the extremity of life. And the impreſſions of love, of conjugal and domeſtic affections; only vary their effects, without loſing their value. If we could accurately ſtate the moments of felicity, enjoyed

enjoyed by a happy bride; and thoſe of a virtuous grandmother, doating on the offspring of beloved children; referring their features, motions, and actions, to thoſe whom death has ſanctified to her memory; tracing by their means the intereſting circumſtances of paſt life; and reviving all its valuable emotions with pure and calm voluptuouſneſs:—if we could render ſuch calculations accurate, would youth be inſultingly preferred to age? We ſhould not fear the approach of a period, replete with ſatisfaction and enjoyment.

You will obſerve, I ſtate theſe advantages, on the ſuppoſition that we lead uſeful lives. *There is no art diſcovered by heaven or earth*, to render age happy, if it ſucceed an idle, uſeleſs, or miſchievous life. Age is like winter; and we are ſuſtained by proviſions made in ſpring, in ſummer, or in autumn. When by natural philoſophy we produce bread, without attention to ſeed or harveſt; we have ſome chance, by moral philoſophy,

or by religion, to furniſh happineſs at the concluſion of life, though we have trifled or miſuſed its early and active ſeaſons.

But it is ſaid, 'at all events, the infirmities and diſorders of age, are evils to be dreaded, as conſiderable abatements of happineſs.' In this caſe, men judge by appearance, and not by knowledge. It is true, years render us infirm; but enjoyments ariſing from recollection, this circumſtance can have no great effect. We are gradually diſpoſed to that quietneſs and reſt, ſo favourable to reflected pleaſures. It is by miſuſing youth, that age is conſigned to painful infirmities. A beautiful woman, who has confined her thoughts to perſonal charms, muſt dread their loſs; having no other means of enjoyment Men, who have cultivated only inſignificant or pernicious talents, dread the approach of a period, which may deſtroy their imagined utility. We obſerve multitudes of ſuch characters, anxiouſly ſtruggling againſt the approaches of age; ſtudiouſly

ſtudiouſly concealing its appearances; and earneſtly wiſhing the return of youth.

As to diſorders, age is not ſo liable to them as youth; nor does it ſuffer ſo much under them. Death is not a certain event at any period; and it is diveſted of terror to a virtuous man, in the calm moments of reflection, to which age is favorable.

But this leads to the limits of life; which I may venture to paſs in another Letter.

I am, my Lord,
Your moſt obedient
And moſt humble ſervant,
THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

LETTER VII.

Nam habet natura, ut aliarum omnium rerum, ſic vivendi modum.

CIC. DE SENECT. Sect. 23.

MY LORD,

DEATH, as the period of exiſtence, is an object of diſinclination; and artifices to accumulate its terrors have been numerous, as the advantages to be obtained by their abatement, or removal. Theſe artifices have given importance, and ſanctity to opinions, which may be groundleſs, miſchievous, or deteſtable. A good underſtanding, directed into uſeful and proper enquiries, may diſcard the opinions, or exchange them: but no improvement in underſtanding, no length of time, will eraſe impreſſions made

made on the mind by falſe apprehenſions, and thoſe ſtrong and terrific paſſions excited by falſe opinions. This is the reaſon, pre-poſſeſſions of infancy and youth recur in age; and that notwithſtanding our improvements, when the powers of reflection decay, when we return into a ſecond infancy, and are ſuſceptible only of the direct ſenſations which influenced early years; the ideas firſt accompanying them may recur, and a philoſopher may die as ſuperſtitiouſly as a monk. This is among the innumerable evils of prepoſſeſſing the mind with opinions, before it has the capacity of forming them. It prevents the fruits of future enquiries and future improvements; diſhonors the evenings of uſeful and glorious lives; and furniſhes impoſtors with plauſible pretences for perpetuating the injuries of ſuperſtition.

I am ſo ſenſible of theſe inconveniences, and of the uſes made of them to ſupport lucrative opinions, that I may take another occaſion to direct your par-

ticular attention to them; conſider the arguments they are ſuppoſed to furniſh; and impart the precautions I mean to take, either to prevent the evil in my own caſe, or to obviate the reflections on truth and freedom, which may poſſibly be made, even on my account.

At this time, I muſt confeſs, while I attempt to lead you in mere contemplation to the vale of death, I feel the power of aſſociated ideas: my imagination is more diſpoſed to ſhade it with heavy clouds; to break it into terrific ſcenes; and to people it with forms, annexed to my apprehenſions by the fables and tales of infancy—than to repreſent it, as exhibited by reaſon and philoſophy, in the mature and perfect uſe of my powers. Senſible of this inconvenience, I cannot be without apprehenſions from public prejudices.

Your Lordſhip will hear me with the more patience, if you recollect, that every motive of intereſt is on the ſide of popular opinions; and that I muſt relinquiſh them

them with regret. Superficial obſervers imagine, popular opinions may be oppoſed from vanity, or the affectation of ſingularity. It is not probable, any ſerious or permanent efforts can be made on ſuch principles: no man will ſteadily and uniformly diſpute propoſitions he believes to be true, without propoſing ſome benefit or advantage: and when a certain loſs in all lucrative concerns, added to general reproach and general odium, are the effects of unpopular tenets; no perſon will inconſiderately adopt them, from whoſe abilities any thing can be apprehended.

Death has been ſtudied with every poſſible view of intereſt; and human imagination cannot invent an additional circumſtance to enhance its advantages. All profitable errors in regard to it are fully ſanctified; and truth alone is heretical, and diſadvantageous. It is ſo diſadvantageous, that hardly any man, who has an intereſt, or an acquaintance to riſque, will dare to utter his thoughts on the ſubject,

ject. I love truth: I love the eſteem I know I ſhall obtain for publicly declaring my thoughts; and making that declaration, in all poſſible caſes, on the utmoſt line of liberty;—beyond every gratification I can derive from the world.—This is the important ſpring of my mind, if any thing in it be important; and though it be not the only motive of my conduct, it will furniſh a reaſon, or juſtification, to thoſe whoſe anger I incur, and whoſe miſrepreſentations I ſuſtain, from the apprehenſion that I may ſpeak or write, whatever I ſuppoſe to be truth.

That the termination of life, is in the general plan of nature, ſeems as clear and indiſputable, as that we are born according to the operation of natural laws: and that every man will live his appointed time, is a principle of philoſophy, as well as a doctrine of religion. But it may be expedient to explain it, in order to promote the intereſts of candor and humanity: as it has been perverted to ſerve thoſe of cruel and lucrative ſuperſtitions.

When

When I affirm, the life of man has a period appointed by nature, I mean that the operation of natural and moral cauſes are ſuch as to define his exiſtence to a moment; exactly as they define his birth. And I think the poſition important; as it may relieve the mind of thoſe apprehenſions, ariſing from an opinion, that life is a benefit, given in truſt by a tyrant; who has numbered its days for his own information; and to whom we are accountable for thoſe we have ignorantly, or impatiently curtailed. Nature abhors this doctrine in all its forms and conſequences. The life of man is like the current of a river, or any effect of general laws. Such is the wiſdom, and as language has no better term, I will call it the goodneſs of God, that theſe effects are, in general, occaſions of enjoyment. But exceptions, at leaſt in appearance, exhibit human lives, and currents of water, in diſadvantageous, inconvenient, and miſchievous ſituations. To ſay, that God will require an account of this arrangement; or that wretches

wretches will be puniſhed for being wretches, by ſuch arrangement; or for being forced by miſeries out of exiſtence; is folly at leaſt: it is affirming, a ſtream ſhould be condemned, for being forced out of any miſchievous direction into the general element.

Obſerve, my Lord, I am ſpeaking of Nature, and of that ineffable principle which actuates it; of whoſe ways I always think with diffidence, becauſe I feel my inability to comprehend them; but whoſe wiſdom I ſee clearly, when I ſee at all. To inveſtigate the diſpoſitions and relations which Nature has appointed, is my whole employment; and to conform to them, my happineſs. This is all I know; or, perhaps, can know on the ſubject. Shall I have the impious preſumption —ſhall I bear to ſee others have the impious preſumption to perſonify this unſearchable and adorable principle; not only in the human form, but in that of a tyrant; in a character more execrable than any ſpecies of villainy has exhibited:

for

for no deſpot has ordained puniſhments for *ſuffering* under laws of his own appointment.

This muſt be the reſult of all ſuperſtitious determinations concerning human life. It is an undeniable principle of religion, as well as of philoſophy, that the period, like the commencement of life, is in the general ſeries of cauſes and effects; and yet the Being ſuppoſed to appoint them, is to puniſh thoſe who ſubmit neceſſarily to their influence and power. You will obſerve, though I endeavor to eſtabliſh a general poſition, that we are incapable of crime or merit before God, in any manner analogous to our mutual offences and merits; I do not direct my obſervations againſt the clear and uſeful foundations of virtue. There are proviſions and capabilities in Nature, for the formation of happy ſocieties, which we are to inveſtigate. If we diſcover them, we obtain the reward; if we do not, the benefit does not accrue: we ſink into the general maſs, and are revolved by laws, whoſe purpoſes we cannot comprehend.

prehend. In political ſocieties, we conſtitute virtues and vices; ſometimes on deſigns, producing happineſs, ſometimes on thoſe producing miſery. In theſe ſituations, the magiſtrate, or the ſupreme power, conſiders lives as property; and it may be an offence againſt his intereſt to render them inconvenient, inſecure, or to take them away. Hence, the laws againſt threatening, endangering, or taking away a man's life; and againſt ſuicide, or ſelf-murder.—Conſidering ſocieties in the general plan of Nature; and the lives of men, neceſſary to the conſtitution of ſocieties; the loſs and deſtruction of men may be an offence againſt Nature. But this material diſtinction ſhould be made, that Nature has nothing analogous to retribution and revenge; and that in civil ſocieties, we are puniſhed for crimes, to furniſh moral motives to avoid them.

The authors of laws and inventors of conſtitutions, not having better means of preventing evils than puniſhments; multiplied their terrors, by referring their com-

completion to fiends and devils in future worlds. In general, it has been a ſufficient misfortune, to be modelled in errors, to be driven into vices, and to ſuffer the miſeries incident to them, by the folly of governments, or of thoſe terreſtrial fiends who have adminiſtered them: and he muſt be a malignant ſpirit, who could ſeriouſly imagine it a mortal ſin, not to preſerve and value life, when only a ſeries of unpleaſant ſenſations; that, becauſe it may be uſeful to a tyrant, the wretched muſt endure it to the utmoſt extremity, or be committed to eternal flames.

Here we have the key to hell. The apprehenſion of eternal tortures only can deter the ſlaves of tyranny from expiring by their own hands. It is the invention of deſpotiſm to frighten the wretched into a ſufferance of life. And it deſerves attention, that the ſeverity of religious and political doctrines, are in proportion to the defects of civil government, or its tendency to deſpotiſm.

You

You may obſerve, in this Letter, I have had my eye on an opinion, which lies at the threſhold of my ſubject; and which it would have been unmanly, though not, perhaps, imprudent to avoid —I mean, the obligation every man is conceived to be under, to preſerve life to the utmoſt moment: and the crime he is ſuppoſed to commit againſt God, in doing any thing to ſhorten it.

I would totally reprobate the execrable impiety of bringing the Deity into queſtions of civil obligation. If men are happy members of happy ſocieties, they cannot; for they have no motive, to deſtroy themſelves. If wretched members of wretched ſocieties; nothing but the fear of hell can prevent them. And if any overcome that fear, and commit the crime: I ſhould be glad to know, where the blame muſt fall, from an equitable judge; on the man whoſe ſituation hath left him no motive to live; or on the magiſtrate, who hath forced him into ſuicide?

You will not miſrepreſent me as an advocate for ſelf-murder, when I mean only to be an apologiſt for the wretched. The proceſſes againſt thoſe, who from diſeaſe, inſanity, or miſery, deprive themſelves of exiſtence; are diſgraceful to the moſt barbarous policy.

Nature has given us life: with no intimation in regard to its continuance; but the enjoyment or pleaſure it affords. And this is ſufficient to induce us to run into its lateſt moments. Political and civil ſocieties have deprived us of the enjoyment: and yet enjoined an obligation, which nature is ſilent upon; to endure, what we have no motive to endure. This, indeed, may be their ſupport: for a tyrant would no ſooner reduce his ſubjects to ſlavery, than his dominions would be depopulated by ſelf-murder; but for the opinion, that the termination of life is a fixed and ſacred gaol, which we are to reach under all inconveniences; and that an offence againſt the obligation is to be eternally puniſhed.

Expe-

Experience and obſervation teach us, that we, like other productions, have our periods of compoſition and decompoſition: as trees, plants, and flowers grow up, flouriſh, and decay; we are likewiſe born, grow up, and die, under the influence of natural and moral cauſes, which we cannot regulate or control.

That theſe periods are as links in the chain of cauſes and effects; and that they are appointed by the Being, who arranged the univerſe, we may ſuppoſe with probability: but that we combat his deſigns, diſappoint his purpoſes; or by any uſe we make of the power allotted us, can intereſt his diſpleaſure;—is the language of preſumptuous vanity, and not of reaſon or philoſophy.

Let us confine our conſequence, my Lord, to the ſocieties we have formed; where our virtues and crimes, lives or death, may be of ſome importance.

Here it is an uſeful doctrine, that the life of man ſhould be ſacred, in his own hands, and in thoſe of others. Human

man enjoyments ſhould be ſecured; and no perſon ſhould have temptations to wiſh himſelf out of life, or to attempt that of another. In ſuch circumſtances, men will live to the utmoſt verge, of what is called their appointed time: but if, by moral and political arrangements, they ſhould be rendered wretched, they will wiſh themſelves out of life; and may, in ſpite of all artificial terrors, uſe either *lingering*, or rapid means, of drawing it to a concluſion. By theſe circumſtances, human ſocieties may appear to be deranged; but the order of Nature is unaffected and invariable.

I am, my Lord,

Your moſt humble ſervant,

THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

LETTER VIII.

O miſerem ſenem, qui mortem contemnendam eſſe, in tam longa ætate non viderit! quæ aut plane negligenda eſt, ſi omnino extinguit animum; aut etiam optanda, ſi aliquo eum deducit, ubi ſit futurus æternus. Atque tertium, nihil invenire poteſt.

CIC. SEN. S. 19.

MY LORD,

I HAVE conſidered Death, as a neceſſary event, in the great ſeries of cauſes and effects. It may be proper to give ſome attention to the ſentiments, with which we ſhould look forward to it; if any thing like anticipation be our duty. All other beings, in our knowledge, ſeem to meet it, without expectation; men only, die daily, from the apprehenſion of dying. How far this may be the effect of ſuperior prudence; or of puſillanimity, generated

rated by the fables of ſuperſtition, concerning death; it may be difficult to determine. On the one hand, it may be an advantage to be aware of our common fate; as plans may be formed on a knowledge of the extent of life. On the other, Nature ſeems to keep the matter out of view, as much as poſſible: the line we have to paſs is ſo indefinite, that we are always upon it before we have any expectation of the event: the youth, who is moſt ſanguine in his views, who ſeems to have the beſt reaſons for entertaining them; and the old man, whoſe days cannot be numerous—are equally uncertain of the limits, at which they muſt give up their lives. This circumſtance does not ſeem intended to favor prevailing apprehenſions of death; nay, the hope of living an indefinite time, which poſſeſſes us at all ages, is the charm Nature has furniſhed, to diſſipate the thoughts of death from the mind.

There would be conſiſtency, propriety, and wiſdom in this proviſion; if men,

like other animals, were merely a mortal being—I mean, if the circumſtances which now produce his intelligence, were not to take place again, ſo as to conſtitute identity, or to give conſciouſneſs of former exiſtence: for in happy circumſtances, the thoughts of death, as an event at a determinate diſtance, would be interruptions, as unpleaſant as they would be unneceſſary.

But it is the general perſuaſion, that death is only one period of exiſtence; though its conſequences be not generally and unanimouſly aſcertained.

If we quit the dogmas of ſuperſtition, which are all peremptory on the ſubject; we may be involved in perplexity on the general doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul. My object being the diſcovery, and my purpoſe the declaration of truth; I will ſtate, as fairly as I can, the different pretenſions to credit of thoſe, who, on the authority of reaſon, maintain the mortality and immortality of the human ſoul. I have, at this time, no probable and immediate

mediate intereſt, in the prevalence of either doctrine. There are no eſtabliſhments in favor of moral truth, nor any premiums for intellectual diſcoveries. The ſatisfaction attending them, and the eſteem of thoſe, who obſerve our induſtry and integrity, muſt be the rewards.

Nothing, however, can be more important, than the enquiry concerning the mortality or immortality of the ſoul. No wiſe and honeſt man can avoid it. The fooliſh and wicked will ſave themſelves the trouble; and take up convenient and prevailing opinions, in the communities, of which they are members.

The virtues are eſſentially different, which are founded on theſe different doctrines. It is by aſſiduous and repeated enquiries into their pretenſions, truth will be aſcertained; and that truth, when aſcertained, will give riſe to wiſe forms of government, and uſeful ſyſtems of morality. Our inconveniences are felt only in circumſtances of uncertainty, and in the proceſs of enquiry; where partial intereſts

militate againſt general truth. But no difficulties ſhould obſtruct the deſire of information. The errors of ſcientific induſtry are uſeful; for abilities are exerted to rectify them: and they keep up a fermentation, the origin of moral, as of natural productions. Eſtabliſhed ſyſtems are ſtagnant waters, where noiſome and bloated reptiles add to a malignant influence: the regions of enquiry are the agitated elements, the ſources of health and utility. It is the deſire of excellent minds, to breath the air of theſe regions; though it may be their misfortune to periſh in attempts to reach them. In ſome ſituations, men are placed as detached plantations on immenſe deſarts; and they look like ſpots dropped from heaven. It is our duty to extend this ſpecies of cultivation; though we hazard every thing from thoſe monſters, who plead preſcriptive rights to impede our utility.

Under the influence of theſe motives, I muſt proceed on the important doctrines before

before me. The enquiry is an offence. An error on the ſide of popular perſuaſion, might ſave me from obloquy; but the diſcovery of truth, in oppoſition to that perſuaſion, would infallibly conſign me to damnation.

It is my intereſt, not only as I wiſh to diſcover truth, but as I hope to eſcape injuries attending enquiry—to enter on the ſubject, with as much circumſpection, as may be conſiſtent with a firm and honeſt determination to examine it.

It cannot be conſtrued an indignity to the Chriſtian religion, to affirm, the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul is not a clear and general doctrine of Nature; becauſe zealous advocates of that religion contend, it is to Chriſtianity we owe the diſcovery of the doctrine.

In early and ſimple periods of ſociety, we perceive men expect to ſurvive the grave; but they have no idea of ſouls. They delineate heaven as a commodious place for the gratification of bodily deſires;

they provide for the wants of the body in its journey, by laying proviſions on the grave; they imagine, the events of this world will recur; and they furniſh the dead with garments, utenſils, and arms.

In this path, we ſhould never arrive at the origin of the ſoul. We muſt, therefore, have recourſe to more improved and happier periods; where ſocial affections are formed, and the people have leiſure to indulge their imaginations.— In ſuch ſituations, grief at the loſs of a friend, or of a lover, would repreſent his image in ſolitude or in dreams. The melancholy delight taken in this image, would familiariſe the mind to it; or give the phantom a ſpecies of reality. A rumor prevailing, that the deceaſed had been ſeen, though only in a dream; it would be conſidered as a communication with the inviſible world; and give riſe to the doctrine of ghoſts.

This doctrine may be corroborated by the influence of guilt on the imagination; ever repreſenting the perſon injured, in ſtrong

ſtrong colours, to the mind. The offender is haunted in dreams; illneſs; and inſanity—by the image of the man he has perſecuted, oppreſſed, or murthered.

Theſe circumſtances are grounds for the invention of ſuch a ſyſtem of immateriality, as we find eſtabliſhed. But we are not to omit, in this caſe, the effect of human vanity. A principle ſo abſurdly extravagant, as not only to deify human nature in the ſubordinate claſſes of the heavenly world; but to make beings, in the human form, participate the empire of the univerſe with the Deity; nay, to make the *Deity a man:*—ſuch a principle would not omit any tolerable occaſion, to extend the limits of human exiſtence; and to raiſe phantoms into immortal ſpirits. It is thus, on the contemplation of the firſt periods of ſociety, we ſhould account for the introduction of ſhades, ghoſts, and ſpirits. That poets ſhould eagerly ſeize occaſions ſo favorable to a deluſive art, is not wonderful. The art of poetry, is that of cloathing thoughts,

and perſonifying images. Here they have acceſs to the hearts of the people; and ſecure fame, while they enjoy public affection. We find, accordingly, the firſt ſtrains of poetry, on theſe ſubjects; accompanied with muſic of a plaintive and melancholy kind.

The intereſt of the people in theſe inviſible ſpirits, ſoon became ſufficiently important to engage men to pretend knowledge of their circumſtances; and to conceive methods of rendering them happy or miſerable. They commenced by legerdemain and conjuration: until Heaven was engaged in the buſineſs; and the Deity impiouſly affirmed to have iſſued commiſſions, to decide the fates of theſe ſhadowy forms. Such audacious pretenſions raiſed them into importance, above all other beings; and the earth ſwarmed with heavenly ambaſſadors, whoſe artful employment had a reference to ſpirits. Nothing relative to political conſtitutions, to legiſlation, to public morals and public felicity, was ſuffered in com-

competition with inviſible intereſts; and emperors, kings, and magiſtrates, became prieſts, or the ſervants of prieſts.

This, on a fair view of the hiſtory of human ſociety, would be the riſe and progreſs of the doctrine of ſpirits.

But the ſubject is of too much importance to be paſſed over in a curſory ſketch.

The firſt abilities and learning have been employed on it; and we ſhould not do it juſtice, if we were to omit the arguments advanced by the wiſdom, either of antient or modern times. I ſhall not always diſtinguiſh their claims; as they are ſo blended, that it would give you and me much unneceſſary trouble.

I will take up the boldeſt and moſt ingenious pretenſions of antient and modern metaphyſicians.

It is ſaid, we have no conception of the Divinity, but that of pure energy; diffuſed through the univerſe; and acting with peculiar effect in animated and rational beings. The principle, governing the human conſtitution, is called the

human ſoul; and being a portion of the divine energy, which is immaterial and immortal;—it is inferred, the ſoul muſt alſo be immaterial and immortal; that there is an evident diſtinction, between mind the mover, and body which is moved, or moveable; and that body and mind are as oppoſite as affirmation and negation.

In order to ſtrengthen theſe arguments, it is ſaid, that *entia rationis*, or fictions of the mind, ſuch as griffins, centaurs, and mountains of gold, have being; that even negation or privation have exiſtence; nay, according to Ariſtotle, we can ſay, Nothing* has a being. In ſhort, whereever we uſe the ſubſtantive verb *Is*, there muſt be ſome kind of being.

It is affirmed, to conceive of mind, we have no more difficulty than to conceive of matter. In the latter, we are obliged to abſtract from ſubſtances, ſuch qualities, as hot, cold, moiſt, dry, bit-

* Τυ μη ον, ειναι μη ον, φαμεν. MET. l. 4. c. 2.

ter,

ter, ſweet, round, ſquare, &c. in order to arrive at the ſubſtance, or the ſubſtratum for theſe qualities. The abſtraction has been carried farther. Extenſion and figure, have been ſeparated from ſubſtance; and what remained, was the matter of the antient philoſophers.

Here matter and ſpirit are not to be diſtinguiſhed: and having purſued the ſubject to this ideal ground, antient and modern philoſophers have denied the exiſtence of either matter or ſpirit.

Aware of theſe conſequences, ſome recurred to principles and powers in ſenſible objects. They ſaid, the ſoul in man is analogous to attraction in a magnet; and the property of attraction in the magnet, was called its ſoul (ψυχη). This ſoul has not the power of ſelf-motion; nay, it is not moved at all, but as a man is moved in a ſhip; or as rowers, by the motion of a boat.

In order to render the argument irrefragable; it is ſaid, denying the immateriality and immortality of the ſoul, leads

to atheiſm. As motion could not commence in the univerſe, without an immaterial ſpirit; no motion could have taken place in the human body, without a portion of that immaterial ſpirit: and as in Nature, ſuch wonderful ends could not have been accompliſhed by wonderful means, without being propoſed, and contrived by ſupreme intelligence; ſo in the human frame, wonderful purpoſes could not have been accompliſhed, without the ſoul, a portion of the Divine Intelligence.

This, I think, is the metaphyſical argument advanced on the ſubject. Reaſons have been added, of ſtronger efficacy, though mere appeals to the paſſions. For example; it is not to be ſuppoſed the Deity would open the book of Nature, and ſhut our eyes when we had fixed them on it; that we are ſent here, to learn the rudiments of knowledge and virtue; and that in a future world, we ſhall make a full and uſeful progreſs: that our hearts are impreſſed with this truth;

for

for it would be cruel to enter into connections, to be immediately broken.— What! is a fond mother to bear the inconveniences and dangers of giving existence to a child; and becauſe its nurſe has been negligent, or becauſe, by accident, it has been deprived of life; is that child to be loſt to the mother for ever? When the ſweet buds of infancy are opened; when the underſtanding is juſt formed, and the affections juſt awakened; are they to be loſt immediately in the grave? What is love; what is friendſhip; what is virtue: if not the properties of a being, who is to ſurvive the grave? Nay, what is life; ſo full of errors and miſeries: if no opportunity be afforded us, to rectify and amend them? How very rational! How perfectly conſiſtent with the idea of a Supreme and Benevolent Being, to imagine, every thing ſhall be reſtored in a world of ſpirits; that the rudiments of life, love, friendſhip, and virtue, we have learnt here;

here; ſhall be of advantage, in ſecuring perfect happineſs hereafter?

Theſe, according to my knowledge, are the ſtrongeſt arguments to prove the immortality of the ſoul. And in theſe arguments, there is nothing to induce us to fear death.

I have the honor to be,

Your Lordſhip's moſt obedient

And moſt humble ſervant,

THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

LETTER IX.

Somnia, terrores magicos, miracula, ſagas,
Nocturnos lemures, portentaque Theſſala rides.

HOR. Lib. 2. Ep. 2.

MY LORD,

IN the diſcuſſion of this important ſubject, I have conſidered the principal arguments, alledged by reaſon, for the immateriality and immortality of the ſoul.

When men had exhauſted their fancies on poſſibilities in worlds of ſpirits; neceſſities and conveniences called them to the immediate employments of life: and as ſocieties cultivated ſciences and arts, they enlarged and ennobled material cauſes; ſpirit is, at this time, totally baniſhed philoſophy: all things being

being referred to mechanical and material cauſes.

To render matter the worthy ſubſtitute of immaterial and immortal ſpirit, it has been refined and ſublimated into non-entity. This is the conſequence of pre-poſſeſſion in favor of impalpable and inviſible cauſes. Matter has been defined to be phyſical points, perpetually revolving; but at diſtances ſo great, that all the matter in the ſolar ſyſtem, is ſuppoſed, by philoſophers of great gravity and reputation, to be comprizable in a nutſhel. We may imagine this, to be the extreme point of abſurdity on the material hypotheſis; for it meets the extreme abſurdity of the immaterial. Phyſical are refined into mathematical points, which are ideas only, and incapable of producing any thing by their motion: matter, on this hypotheſis, is nothing, and can produce nothing; and, therefore, there can be no material world.

Philoſophers, aware of theſe conſequences, have defined every object of ſenſe,

ſenſe, to be a compound of active and paſſive phyſical powers, viz. of matter and motion; its paſſive part being that ſubſtance, by whoſe reſiſtance and re-action, its conſtituent ſyſtem of motion is preſerved; its active, or motive parts, that combination of directions, which conſtitute ſuch a ſyſtem. But what idea has your Lordſhip of the reſiſtance of paſſiveneſs? What is a direction; or a combination of directions? and what are theſe motive parts? They are unintelligible, as the common doctrine of immateriality. Beſides, the poſition, which is the origin of this jargon, ſeems to be falſe. What authority can be produced, that any being is a compoſition of matter and motion; while all we know in nature, conſiſts of action and re-action, neither of which can reſide in ſubſtances truly paſſive. In fact, all the appearances in nature, are produced by motion; and all we know of it is motion.

Primary powers, or the ſubſtratum of them, are not ſuſceptible of definition; we

+ we are acquainted only with their effects. Whatever be the ſubſtance, or ſubſtances, conſtituting man; they come, according to the diſcoveries of natural philoſophy, under the general idea of material; for the body of a man, like that of any other animal, comes into the world, without furniſhing any intimations of a ſoul. Materialiſts, therefore, deny its exiſtence; and allege, the ſuperiority of man over other animals and other machines; purely from the ſuperior excellence of his conſtruction and organization. The advocates of immateriality, have been ſo ſenſible of the force of this argument, that they have endeavoured to ward it off, by aſſigning periods for the entrance of the ſoul. Theſe periods have varied with the ſyſtems of various advocates. According to ſome of them, the ſoul has accompanied the performance of religious ceremonies; and others affirm, it does not arrive at the human body till the age of puberty.

This

This uncertainty, as to the time when the ſoul takes poſſeſſion, and the ridiculous controverſies of religious zealots concerning it; inſtead of ſerving, diſcredit the general cauſe. For materialiſts having obtained the important conceſſion, that the child is born without a ſoul; treat, as abſurd and uſeleſs, all attempts to inſert it, after the birth of the body.

This kind of materialiſm has been, and is ſtill treated, as the moſt alarming and pernicious error. But, if we enquire, what is a ſoul? and define it to be an intelligent and virtuous principle; it is certain, man is born with no ſuch principle. All the philoſophers who have ſuppoſed knowledge ariſes from ſenſation, have, in fact, argued in favor of materialiſm; and rendered the diſtinction between ſoul and body unneceſſary. It has, therefore, been alleged, as all appearances relating to man, may be accounted for by mechanical principles; the introduction of a ſuperior and immaterial Being, would be an abſurdity, and an offence to

right

right reaſon; which never allows more cauſes than are neceſſary to produce their effects.

Man does not differ from the loweſt reptile, but in circumſtances which may be fairly accounted for, by the advantages of conſtruction, and the ſuperiority of organization. The line between vegetable and animal life is almoſt imperceptible; and the gradation, from the loweſt animal to man, is exactly the ſame in mental power as in bodily conſtruction. If, therefore, from inability in matter to produce thought, an immaterial ſoul is neceſſary to man, it is neceſſary to an oyſter; and the claim of the latter to immortality, on this mode of reaſoning, is equal to that of the former.

Materialiſts have maintained; as the beſt arguments, on this ſubject, are produced by analogy, there are no facts in nature, which countenance the doctrine of immortality—that motion ſeems to be eſſential to all matter; that the vivyfying

principle

principle in herbs, trees, animals, and men, depends alike on organization: and when that is deſtroyed, herbs, trees, animals, and men, return alike to the common aggregate of univerſal elements.

They add, if the ſoul were diſtinct from the body; our ideas, knowledge, and virtues, would not be gradually taught by ſenſation, and require a particular conſtruction of the brain and limbs: if the body were the inſtrument, and the ſoul the being playing on it—upon any fatal accident to the inſtrument, the ſoul would not be involved in the deſtruction; for a muſician is not deſtroyed with his muſical inſtrument. Like the vivifying powers of all the parts of vegetable and animal life, the faculties of the human mind grow gradually with the body; are at their maturity when the body is formed; decay when it decays; and are extinguiſhed at its death.

But a moral objection hath met the materialiſts; which they have been at the pains of anſwering.

It

It has been ſaid, good and evil are not juſtly and equally diſtributed here; there muſt be, therefore, a world of retribution: that bodies being fluctuating and variable in their conſtituent parts, cannot preſerve ſo much perſonal identity, as to be the proper ſubjects of rewards and puniſhments; and of conſequence, there muſt be an immaterial, unchangeable, and immortal ſoul.

Not to dwell on the impious impertinence, which is continually deciding on good and evil in Nature; of which we have no knowledge, no materials of knowledge, but the bare ſenſe of pleaſure and pain: not to inſiſt on our total ignorance of juſtice and equity, but as we find them in ſocieties of our own forming; and the enormous abſurdity of applying ideas, ſo formed, to the Divine Being:—we ought to have good and clear authority, before we aſcribe iniquity, injuſtice, or imperfection to the divine government. Beſides, we ſhall be obliged to imagine void worlds and regions, in which

which, by indefinite ſucceſſions, the Deity is to be eternally occupied, in amending the errors of his works; employing ſome of his creatures in a way to increaſe their happineſs, and torturing others with vengeance and implacability; the very conception of which is the abomination, and diſgrace of the human imagination.

But to obviate the abſurdity of void regions, to receive migrating beings; it has been ſaid, they take up no room, and that they have neither length, breadth, or thickneſs.

To this, materialiſts have anſwered, we can have no conception of ſuch beings; and their exiſtence not being neceſſary to account for any effects, we have no reaſons to imagine that exiſtence; nay, that any hypotheſis, reſpecting them, is pregnant with abſurdity. For a non-entity to have exiſtence is a contradiction in terms; a phyſical point, which has no dimenſion; or mathematical point, which has no ſubſtance, and is incapable of occupying place, to be ſent from world to world,

or

or attached to different bodies, without the poſſibility of affecting them,—is the wild extravagance of ſpiritual inſanity. And yet according to the hypotheſis of immaterial ſubſtances; this Being, which is a portion, or image of the Divinity; which has not a quality in common with matter; is to influence and conduct its operations: without being capable of occupying a place, it is to dwell in the human conſtitution; without parts to admit of ſenſibility, it is to have paſſions, to receive the impreſſions of outward objects, to acquire knowledge, to become virtuous or vicious, and to receive rewards or puniſhments, of a ſubſtantial and palpable kind, in a future world. This is deemed the utmoſt extravagance of theological abſurdity: for reaſon, thought, and action, being evidently and indiſputably the properties of organized beings; when the organs are ſeparated, every thing which can be called a ſoul, is wholly ſuſpended and loſt.

Some

Some philoſophers, ſeeing the force of this kind of reaſoning, and the neceſſity of giving up immaterial ſpirits, have contended, man may be immortal, though merely material; and have endeavored to ſupport the hypotheſis, by arguments from reaſon and analogy.

They ſay, there is ſomething in the human conſtitution, which conſtitutes its identity; is invariable in idea, though all the particles of the body frequently change; and is not deſtroyed at death. A river continues the ſame, though in one day, it contain not a drop of the water, it had in another; and we have an idea of the identity of rivers, independently of the waters compoſing them.

But water alone does not form a river; it muſt move in a bed of definite length, and breadth; its channel and banks are circumſtances, which preſerve its identity, though the waters change every moment. We have not ſufficient reaſons to ſuppoſe, all the particles of the body are frequently changed during its whole exiſt-

ence. If it were the caſe; being changed in ſucceſſion, the time taken up would make the alteration imperceptible, and a ſenſe of identity be preſerved. If accompliſhed in a year, as ſome ſuppoſe, it would not be adequate to a diſſolution; and a ſenſe of identity would be retained. The more palpable and ſolid parts, are like the banks and beds of rivers, or the ſituation and grounds of foreſts: by them, and not by parts immediately and hourly removed, perſonal identity is fixed. And it is their diſſolution we denominate Death. This is like deſtroying the channels of rivers, or ſcattering, by an earthquake, the foundations of foreſts; all idea of perſonal identity is irrecoverably loſt.

The advocates for immortality on the material hypotheſis ſay, ſimilarity and continuity of conſciouſneſs, are the only circumſtances neceſſary to perſonal identity; and they may be preſerved after death. Continuance of conſciouſneſs could not be preſerved, but by ſucceſſive

and

and alternate changes of conſtituent parts. A total change, in the ſame inſtant, would deſtroy conſciouſneſs. It is by taking, at one time, only ſmall portions of the parts, on which impreſſions are made; and by the power of thoſe which remain to communicate received impreſſions, that conſciouſneſs is preſerved. Death ſeparates all the parts at once; and, therefore, deſtroys all conſciouſneſs.

The opinion of ſtamina, or particles conſtituting the germ of the organical body—are not in their *proper matrix* in the grave; and, therefore, give no hopes of a reſurrection.

Bonnet's experiments on the *re-production* of parts of animals, to prove the parts of future plants, animals, &c. were contained in germs; though often mentioned with the inſolence of aſſumed ſuperiority in natural ſcience; is impertinent. If Bonnet's theory were demonſtrated, it would prove nothing towards a reſurrection. Let ingenious anatomiſts reproduce amputated or putrified limbs,

decayed lungs, or vitiated brains; and we will hear this pompous philoſophy about germs. In the mean time, we may regret, philoſophers are inſolent when ignorant in natural ſcience; not when their induſtry has produced an actual experiment.

Alluſions to ſeeds in the earth, and butterflies from eggs; are ſimilar to the philoſophy of germs.

As the laſt reſource of diſtreſſed ſophiſts in this matter, they ſay, there would be nothing more miraculous in our reſurrection than in our birth.

What *philoſopher* will ſay, our birth is miraculous? or *reaſon* concerning a future reſurrection, which is to be miraculous? What modeſt diſciple of Nature, will require the aſſent and hope of men on ſuch abſurdities?

The caſe of caterpillars becoming butterflies, may amuſe ſophiſts. It is taken for granted, caterpillars are unconſcious of their future deſtination. We know not they are. The transformation may render

render them different beings, and deſtroy recollection. But what has this in common with the transformation of animals, or men? The former is a fact in nature; the latter a dream in the imagination of perſons defective in natural ſcience.

The alluſion to extinguiſhing a candle, and lighting it up again, is puerile. And the idea of the power of God, to recompoſe, what has been de-compoſed, is unphiloſophical; for it is not warranted by a ſingle fact. The act of decompoſition, in nature, is a tranſition from one mode of exiſtence to another; without preſerving, in the latter, the properties, which diſtinguiſh the former. And this is the idea of death, according to the ancient and genuine doctrine of thoſe philoſophers, who are called materialiſts: for they not only deny the immateriality and immortality of the ſoul; but affirm, there is no authority or reaſon to believe, the body, when decompoſed by death, will,

by any proceſs on the known laws of Nature, be ever recompoſed.

I have fairly and impartially ſtated the arguments, advanced by philoſophers on the immortality and mortality of the human ſoul. I ſhall purſue the different doctrines, into their different conſequences, in another letter.

I have the honor to be,
My Lord,
Your Lordſhip's moſt obedient
And moſt humble ſervant,
THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

LETTER X.

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoſcere cauſas;
Atque metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum,
Subjecit pedibus, ſtrepitumque Acherontis avari.
VIRG. GEORG. Lib. 2.

MY LORD,

HAVING conſidered the different arguments, advanced by philoſophy, for the mortality and immortality of the ſoul; if your Lordſhip will have patience, we will deſcend into opinions and fables, on which the creeds and religions of the common people have been founded.

Diodorus Siculus ſays, 'the puniſhments of the wicked in Tartarus; the 'manſions of the bleſſed in the Elyſian 'Fields; and ſome other tenets, are evi-'dently borrowed from the funeral rites

' of the Egyptians.' The day of interment was intimated to the judges; then to the family and friends of the deceaſed. The intimation was given by mentioning the perſon's name; and by ſaying, he is going to paſs the Lake, on the confines of which were the happy plains, called the manſions of the dead, where the bodies were depoſited in tombs. The judges aſſembled; and before the coffin was put into the boat, the law permitted all the people to ſtate their complaints. If convicted of having led a wicked life; the judges condemned him, and he was deprived of burial. But if the accuſer failed in his proofs, he incurred ſevere penalties. When no accuſer appeared; or when he was convicted of calumny, all the relations laid aſide their mourning, and celebrated the praiſes of the deceaſed. They extolled his piety, his juſtice, his courage; and prayed the Gods to receive him into the manſions of the bleſſed. The whole audience applauded the funeral oration; added new encomiums; and con-

congratulated the dead on entering a peaceful and happy abode.

Porphyry has preſerved the abſolution, the prieſts uſed on that occaſion. 'O Sun, thou firſt Divinity! and ye ce-'leſtial Gods! from whom men have de-'rived life, vouchſafe to receive me this 'day into your holy tabernacles. I have 'endeavoured, to the beſt of my power, 'to render my life acceptable to you. 'I have demeaned myſelf with the higheſt 'veneration to the Gods, whom I was 'taught to worſhip in my infancy. I 'never failed in my duty to thoſe who 'gave me being. My hands are pure 'from my neighbor's blood. I maintain-'ed an inviolable regard to truth and 'fidelity. And may I not appeal to the 'ſilence of men, who have nothing to 'lay to my charge, as a ſure teſtimony 'of my integrity? If however, any 'perſonal, or ſecret faults, have eſcaped 'me, either in eating or drinking, theſe 'entrails bear the blame!' The relations produced the entrails; which were

thrown into the lake: and the body was conveyed to the manſions of the dead.

The Greek, Roman, and the Chriſtian mythologies, are borrowed from theſe cuſtoms; more than from thoſe of the Eaſt. If we believe accounts lately written of Eaſtern mythology; the doctrine of the Bramins, concerning ſouls, has more conſiſtency than any other: for ſuppoſing the Divine Nature to be æther, or elementary fire, ſouls may be plauſibly ſuppoſed emanations from it; and after a certain number of emigrations, they may return to their origin.

Pythagoras has blended Eaſtern metaphyſics with the groſs mythology of Egypt. He ſays, the ſoul at death is conducted by Mercury into the pureſt air; there it becomes like the Gods; while the wicked are tormented by furies, without intermiſſion. But after the ſeaſon of purification, they return to the earth to animate new bodies. He firſt taught publickly in Europe the doctrine of tranſmigration; into animals, fiſhes, birds; and

and in three thouſand years, into human bodies. A circulation of this ſort, in infinitum, is the Pythagorean doctrine of immortality: and the firſt conceptions of it induced the Egyptians, as well as the inhabitants of the Eaſt, to negleſt their houſes as *inns*, and to beſtow conſiderable ſums on their tombs—it being of leſs importance to build for the living than the dead.

Socrates diſtinguiſhes three ſtates of ſouls, or rather attenuated bodies. Thoſe who had not great merit, or great vices, inhabited the confines of Acheruſia; where, being purified by water, they received the little reward they deſerved. The ſouls of the wicked wandered around their tombs, where they were tormented; and having drank of Lethe, entered new bodies, according to their qualities. The ſouls of the virtuous went immediately into the Elyſian fields.

Plato ſays, when a man dies, he goes into a divine region, and is there judged. If his life has been agreeable to reaſon,

he is advanced to an honorable apartment; where he enjoys proſperity and pleaſure in the ſociety of the Gods. Bad men ſink into a noiſome abyſs; dwell in perfect darkneſs; and ſuffer exquiſite miſery. This philoſopher ſpeaks of the ſoul as a palpable and material ſubſtance, though he wiſhes to be otherwiſe underſtood: and in his deſcriptions of hell, of the Elyſian fields, their rivers, judges, furies, &c. he only copies Homer.

Ariſtotle ſpeaks of the ſoul as a fifth ſubſtance, diſtinct from the four elements. It is poſſible, if Ariſtotle had been obliged to explain the idea, he would have defined a ſoul, to be the effect and property of an organized body; like reaſon, thought, and ſenſation.

Moſes does not appear to have had an idea of ſpirit; nor was the belief of it any part of the original religion of the Jews. After their captivities under the kings of Perſia, they diſcovered an attachment to the fables of the Eaſt; and blended the doctrines of immortality with their religious

gious tenets. The cabaliſts affirmed, ſouls are produced by the Holy Ghoſt; that ſpirits produce ſpirits, as ideas do ideas: that the ſoul being an emanation from the Deity, every part of whom is infinite, multiplies itſelf infinitely; that all ſouls were contained in that of Adam, and ſinned with him.

The fathers of the church have adopted *all convenient* opinions on the ſubject. They are ſometimes cabaliſts, ſometimes Pythagoreans, ſometimes Platoniſts, according to prevailing views. Some believed a ſtate of general ſleep would take place until the reſurrection; ſupported by the opinion, that Enoch, Elijah, and Jeſus, had aſcended to heaven without quitting their bodies. Others diſpoſed of ſouls in receptacles and priſons, from the creation to the general judgment. To theſe ſouls Jeſus preached. Good ſpirits were ſent to heaven, and the wicked to purgatory: all thought the addition of the body neceſſary to the happineſs of paradiſe

paradiſe, and the torments or miſeries of hell.

Deſcartes, Malebranche, Leibnitz, &c. have afforded no new light on the ſubject. Philoſophers have only indulged imaginations; it may, therefore, be more entertaining to attend to the reveries of poets, who pretend to no higher authorities than fable, tradition, and fancy.

Theſe votaries of the Muſes, whoſe object is not truth, and whoſe talent is not reaſon; have taken up the ſentiments of philoſophers, and uſed them according to their fancies. They have placed the Elyſian fields or heaven, in the middle region of the air; in the moon; in the ſun; in the centre of the earth; and in one of the fortunate iſlands. Some copied the exaggerated accounts of Betica, now called Andaluſia, in Spain; where the Phenicians reſorted, and gave riſe to the deſcriptions of the Elyſian fields. The antients repreſent it watered with rivers, ſtreams, and fountains; bleſſed

bleſſed with charming plains, woods, enchanted groves, mountains with mines of gold and ſilver, and a ſoil producing pleaſing abundance.

Tarteſſus, in the extremity of this province, is thought to be Tartarus. The ancients appear to have been acquainted with nothing beyond it; they thought the ſun went to bed every evening in the ocean, and that here the region of eternal darkneſs commenced.

Homer deſcribes Ulyſſes, in his voyage, as arriving on the confines of this country, as on thoſe of hell.

Now ſunk, the ſun from his aërial height,
And o'er the ſhaded billows ruſh'd the night:
When lo! we reach'd old Ocean's utmoſt bounds,
Where rocks controul'd his waves with ever-during mounds.

The ſhip we moor on theſe obſcure abodes;
Diſbark the ſheep, an off'ring to the Gods;
And hell-ward bending, o'er the beach, deſcry
The doleful paſſage to th' infernal ſky.

Thus ſolemn rites and holy vows we paid,
To all the phantom nations of the dead.

When

When lo! appear'd along the duſky coaſts,
Thin airy ſhoals of viſionary ghoſts;
Fair penſive youths, and ſoft enamour'd maids;
And wither'd elders pale and wrinkled ſhades;
Ghaſtly with wounds the forms of warriors ſlain;
Stalk'd with majeſtic port, a martial train:
Theſe, and a thouſand more, ſwarm'd o'er the ground,
And all the dire aſſembly ſhriek'd around.

HOM. ODYSS. B. xi.

It was the doctrine of poetic theology, that the body changed into aſhes; the ſpirit returned to the firſt cauſe; and the ſoul, the phantom and image of the body, deſcended to the infernal regions.

The entrance to theſe regions is deſcribed by Virgil.

Juſt in the gate; and in the jaws of hell,
Revengeful cares, and ſullen ſorrows dwell;
And pale diſeaſes, and repining age;
Want, fear, and famine's unreſiſted rage:
Here toils and death, and death's half-brother ſleep,
Forms terrible to view, their centry keep:
With anxious pleaſures of a guilty mind,
Deep frauds before, and open force behind:
The furies iron beds, and ſtrife that ſhakes
Her hiſſing treſſes, and unfolds her ſnakes.

After

After certain purgations in a vaſt foreſt, and a general judgment, they entered either Elyſium or Tartarus—of which we have the following deſcription:

Theſe holy rites perform'd, they took their way,
Where long extended plains of pleaſure lay.
The verdant fields with thoſe of heaven may vie;
With æther veſted, and a purple ſky:
The bliſsful ſeats of happy ſouls below:
Stars of their own, and their own ſuns they know.
Their airy limbs, in ſports they exerciſe,
And, on the green, contend the wreſtler's prize;
Some, in heroic verſe, divinely ſing,
Others in artful meaſures lead the ring.

VIRG. EN. B. vi.

But to avoid the groſs abſurdities of this ſyſtem, they blended it with that of Pythagoras; which is beautifully deſcribed in the following lines:

Know firſt, that heav'n and earth's compacted frame,
And flowing waters and the ſtarry flame,
And both the radiant lights, one common ſoul
Inſpires and feeds and animates the whole.
This active mind infus'd thro' all the ſpace,
Unites and mingles with the mighty maſs.

Hence

Hence men and beaſts the breath of life obtain;
And birds of air and monſters of the main.
Th' ætherial vigor is in all the ſame,
And every ſoul is fill'd with equal flame:
As much as earthy limbs, and groſs allay
Of mortal members, ſubject to decay,
Blunt not the beams of heav'n and edge of day.
From this coarſe mixture of terreſtial parts,
Deſire and fear, by turns poſſeſs their hearts:
And grief and joy: nor can the groveling mind,
In the dark dungeon of the limbs confin'd,
Aſſert the native ſkies; or own its heavenly kind.
Nor death itſelf can wholly waſh their ſtains:
But long-contracted filth even in the ſoul remains.
The relicks of inveterate ſin they wear,
And ſpots of ſin obſcene, in every face appear.
For this, are various penances enjoin'd;
And ſome are hung to bleach upon the wind;
Some plung'd in waters, others purg'd in fires,
'Till all the dregs are drain'd, and all the ruſt expires.
All have their manes, and thoſe manes bear:
The few, ſo cleans'd, to the abodes repair:
And breathe, in ample fields, the ſoft Elyſian air.
Then are they happy, when by length of time
The ſcurf is worn away, of each committed crime.
No ſpeck is left, of their habitual ſtains;
But the pure æther of the ſoul remains.
But when a thouſand rolling years are paſt,
(So long their puniſhments and penance laſt)

Whole

Whole droves of minds are, by the driving God,
Compell'd to drink the deep Lethean flood:
In large forgetful draughts to ſteep the cares
Of their paſt labours, and their irkſome years.
That, unremembring of its former pain,
The ſoul may ſuffer mortal fleſh again.

VIRG. EN. B. vi.

Souls condemned to Tartarus or hell, were repreſented as dwelling there for ever; and the deſcription of the place is perfectly horrible.

The hero, looking on the left, eſpied,
A lofty tow'r, and ſtrong on every ſide
With treble walls, which Phlegethon ſurrounds,
Whoſe fiery flood the burning empire bounds:
And preſs'd betwixt the rocks, the bellowing noiſe reſounds.
Wide is the fronting gate, and rais'd on high
With adamantine columns, threats the ſky,
Vain is the force of man, and heav'n's as vain,
To cruſh the pillars which the pile ſuſtain.
Sublime on theſe a tow'r of ſteel is rear'd;
And dire Tiſiphoné there keeps the ward,
Girt in her ſanguine gown, by night and day,
Obſervant of the ſouls that paſs the downward way.
From hence are heard, the groans of ghoſts, the pains
Of ſounding laſhes, and of dragging chains.

Theſe

Theſe are the realms of unrelenting fate:
And awful Rhadamanthus rules the ſtate.
He hears, and judges each committed crime;
Inquires into the manner, place, and time;
The conſcious wretch muſt all his acts reveal;
(Loth to confeſs, unable to conceal:)
From the firſt moment of his vital breath,
To his laſt hour of unrepenting death.
Straight o'er the guilty ghoſt, the fury ſhakes
The ſounding whip, and brandiſhes her ſnakes:
And the pale ſinner, with her ſiſters, takes
Then of itſelf, unfolds th' eternal door:
With dreadful ſounds, the brazen hinges roar.

Had I a hundred mouths, a hundred tongues,
And throats of braſs, inſpir'd with iron lungs,
I could not half thoſe horrid crimes repeat:
Nor half the puniſhments thoſe crimes have met.
VIRG. EN. B. vi.

This may be conſidered as an hiſtoric account of the opinions, concerning the future deſtiny of ſouls, which civil policy adopted; which poetry adorned and rendered popular. We ſee the origin of theſe opinions in the Egyptian cuſtoms, at the interment of the dead.—And the inference from hiſtory, is the ſame

ſame we muſt make from the ſeveral arguments and reaſons of metaphyſicians—that men were originally converſant only with bodies; that they proceeded to imagine ſhades; airy ſpirits; portions of elementary ſpirits—till the later Platoniſts aſſerted the opinions of immaterial ſubſtances. But all the doctrines of future puniſhment and reward, which either policy or ſuperſtition have eſtabliſhed, are evidently on the ſuppoſition, that the beings to partake and ſuffer them, are material.

I am, my Lord,
Your moſt obedient
And moſt humble ſervant,
THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

LETTER XI.

——Me vero delectat; idque primum ita eſſe velim; deinde etiamſi non ſit, mihi tamen perſuadere velim.

CIC. TUSC.

MY LORD,

ON the ſubject of death, I have been induced to glance at the doctrines, which have furniſhed all its importance, and have drawn to it the principal attention of mankind:—and having conſidered the metaphyſical arguments, on man as a mortal or an immortal being: and given a ſhort account of popular opinions concerning ſouls; we may take up the matter in a moral and political view; and try the different doctrines, by the difference of their effects.

On

On this and every view of the ſubject, I wave all conſideration of the prevalence of opinions; becauſe it proves nothing in regard to truth or utility. The affected concern for what is abſurdly, if not impiouſly, called the moral character of the Deity, I hold in the utmoſt contempt. Evil and error may ſhade the globe in moral proceſſes, as waters involve its ſurface; without furniſhing proofs or preſumptions in their favor; or warranting any reference *from ſuch creatures as we are*, to moral principles in the Divine Nature. Indeed, the character or attributes of the Deity, are poetic fabrications of the human imagination, perhaps of human vanity; ever bringing the Univerſal Principle to a level with man; enduing him with affections and qualities, which *ſuppoſe him aſſociated*, and the member of ſome earthly community. Hence the reference to his mercy and compaſſion; his juſtice, and even his goodneſs: qualities which, in a philoſophical ſenſe, have not always even an analogy

to

to thoſe by which the proceſſes of Nature are continually carried on. All reference to theſe qualities, which have no exiſtence out of ſociety, becauſe they are created by ſociety, cannot be admitted as argument. My general ſilence, therefore, on pretences from the moral character of the Deity; will, I truſt, be accounted for: not from an apprehenſion of their force and validity, but a conviction, that no ſuch moral character exiſts, except in mythology, fable, and poetry; and that it is abſurd, in accurate diſquiſitions, whatever may be allowed in perſuaſive orations, to ſay, God is merciful, or even juſt; as to ſay, he has hands and feet, or is hungry and thirſty.

We are to regard the moral, as we do the natural world; and to conſider ignorance errors and vices in the former; as we do deſarts torrents and eruptions in the latter—theſe things are circumſtances in the general proceſſes of nature; of the good or evil of which we have often no comprehenſion: it is when they

come into relations with our little regulations or our little ſocieties, that ideas ariſe of benefit or injury, and therefore of good or evil. It is by effects on human ſocieties, we judge of the different doctrine of the mortality or immortality of man.

I will not enter on the queſtion, whether ſociety has its origin in parental authority; in a compact between the governors and the governed; or in a divine and miraculous regulation. It is ſufficient for my purpoſe, that no ſociety can exiſt, without certain inducements to obſerve its regulations. That theſe inducements have been various, as the forms of government in which they have taken place; and that the ſocieties, as well as the motives on which they depend, have ariſen from the various circumſtances of men—may be true: and may induce a philoſopher, who conſiders the univerſe, in the aggregate, as a perfect ſyſtem of connected cauſes—to ſay, they are equally good; becauſe all ſub-

ject to the ſame neceſſity That government, therefore, which is ſupported merely by the benefits it beſtows; that which requires reverſionary expectations; and that which is influenced by the terrors of hell:—are all equal in the univerſal ſyſtem, and all involved in univerſal cauſes.

But as happineſs of every kind is ordained to be the effect of ſome action or ſome effort; the purchaſe of ſome inconvenience or ſome evil:—we ſeem deſtined, in ſocieties, to go through all poſſible errors, or to taſte all poſſible miſeries, in order to form and reliſh a ſtate of ſocial happineſs. In this view of things, the very conſideration or compariſon of the ſanctions of human ſocieties, which may be the neceſſary effect of inconvenience and wretchedneſs, becomes a very reſpectable cauſe (for, in my apprehenſion, there is a diſtinction in cauſes) of improvements and revolutions in ſocial regulations.

On theſe accounts, we may not be miſemployed in comparing the different governments,

vernments, under which the ſanctions of preſent or future motives, have, and may be uſed; with a view to aſcertain their effects on the morals and happineſs of men.

In the firſt tendencies and operations of Nature to form communities, we obſerve only ſecurity, or freedom from the apprehenſion of violence: and the firſt virtue is juſtice, enforced by the power of the ſtate. In this caſe, to guard the weak againſt the ſtrong, nothing more is neceſſary, than to counteract force by force, or by the apprehenſion of force: the ſtate undertaking to retaliate injuries on offenders, to prevent the repetition of offences. This is the firſt improvement into virtue, of the only principle we are born with, a ſenſe of pleaſure and pain: and here the deſire is formed, which is the origin of intellectual and moral happineſs; that of finding happineſs in the happineſs of others. On theſe ſimple and natural principles, we may not only imagine, ſocieties are ſuſceptible of the higheſt poſſi-

ble improvements, without the aid of external ſanctions from heaven or hell; but we have facts to give probability to ſuch an hypotheſis. The ſmall ſocieties formed in Greece, previous to the ſplendor of the Greek name, were colonies from Egypt; who availed themſelves of Egyptian fables, to obtain a ſettlement among the original inhabitants. As they advanced in the art of producing public happineſs; the real art of government; they ſunk theſe fables into diſhonor; ſimplified political regulations: till, in the laſt and greateſt efforts of their underſtanding, they produced the governments of Athens and Sparta; whoſe morals had no motive, out of the ſocieties where they were immediately practiſed. In Italy, numerous little eſtates were abſorbed by the Roman Republic; which adopted the ſuperſtitions, while it took poſſeſſion of the territories, of its neighbors. Theſe, however, when collected into Rome, had no credit or conſequence; but as expedients, to a government which deemed every

every thing uſeful that extended its conqueſts. Roman virtue, public and private, was ſupported by internal regulations; of preſent and temporary effect. Roman glory, in the higheſt enthuſiaſm of that paſſion, was confined to this world: for the Romans do not ſeem to have had an idea of a future ſtate, until the Greek philoſophy introduced it. And though maintained by the eloquence of Cicero, and the daily inſtructions of Greek philoſophers in the ſchools of Rome; the doctrine was ſo ſlow in its progreſs, that when the firſt Chriſtians appeared, one of the accuſations againſt them was, they preached the doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments; rendered men indifferent to their country; and remiſs or cowardly in its defence.

The immediate proviſions of Nature, in regard to morals and public happineſs, ſeem to be compriſed in the regulations of juſtice and the deſire of public happineſs: even the paſſion for glory, which drew the Greeks beyond the confines of

their territories; led Alexander to ravage and ſubdue the world; which ſtimulated the Romans to deeds of military valour, and enabled them to enſlave mankind;—had no motive beyond preſent and political advantages attending the gratification of unlimited power.

The world, however, has exhibited ſcenes of equal brilliancy on different motives.

We have obſerved, on the firſt eſtabliſhment of juſtice; in conſequence of which the ſtrong is not to poſſeſs the property, or perſon of the weak, and every man is to ſeek his happineſs, while he is witneſs to the happineſs of another; that a ſtate of mutual aſſiſtance or ſervices takes place, and the moſt amiable, the moſt uſeful of all ſocial principles is adopted —that of becoming happy through the happineſs of others.

Here, as in other caſes, the line which ſeparates good and evil is imperceptible. While ſome adopt the natural or genuine principle, of ſeeking the multi-

plied

plied gratifications of benevolence, public ſpirit, friendſhip, and love; which may prefer mankind, a country, a friend, a miſtreſs, to any private intereſt: others, ſeeking perſonal gratification even in ſociety, exchange only the mode of preying on others, which they had been forced out of by the regulations of juſtice. Regarding men, only for the perſonal advantages they afford them, they loſe the affection which diſtinguiſhes ſociety from a ſtate of nature: and, by ſubſtituting ſelfiſhneſs for the deſire of happineſs, lay the foundation of thoſe errors and vices, which infeſt the world.

I ſuppoſe all the difference of men; and all the virtues or vices which are the conſequences of thoſe differences, to originate either in the opinion, that the moment we enter ſociety, we are to drop perſonal conſiderations or perſonal principles; to live for our families, our friends, our country; and find happineſs in their happineſs: or, retaining them, and acting on the pure principles of ſelf-love, regard all around

us only as inſtruments of our gratification, and means of procuring ſome advantage. I am ſo convinced of this truth, that I never ſaw a good action which was not, in my apprehenſion, performed on the former principle; or a bad action, which was not directly referrable to the latter. It is in vain to ſay, the ill-effects of ſelf-love, may be obviated by moral policy; which directs men to do good to others, as they ſow ſeed, in hopes of harveſt. The human mind is not capable of any proceſs in this matter, analogous to that of ſowing ſeed with the expectation of harveſt. It is actuated by inſtantaneous paſſion: and if not careful to conceive or cultivate affections for mankind, or immediately to enjoy their happineſs, without attending to their being the inſtruments of its own—if it view them only as inſtruments, it muſt become inſtantly vicious; and regard itſelf only, as the being to be ſecured, affected, or gratified by all the events in the world.

On this principle of ſelfiſhneſs, variouſly modified; the various deviations from the firſt and ſimple regulations of ſociety, in the different forms of government now prevailing, took place. A tranſition was ſoon and eaſily made from one object to another, as the end of human ſociety. On the eſtabliſhment of magiſtracy, the principle of ſelfiſhneſs ſeparated the magiſtrate from the public; as it generally ſeparates the individual: and made him regard ſociety, of which he was the creature, inſtrument, and ſervant; as the occaſion of private aggrandizement or power. However aſtoniſhing the deſpotiſm of a few men, over whole nations; the ſteps to it are eaſy and obvious to the eye of ambition. On the firſt deviation from inſtitutions immediately ſuggeſted by Nature, the public object is changed. When the power of government is to be ſupported, in any degree, for its own ſake; the people muſt have a motive different from any we have hitherto pointed out, as ariſing out of the conſtitution of ſo-

ciety. A regard to the public, as the ſource of private happineſs, and the deſire of promoting it; or the genuine paſſion of patriotiſm and public ſpirit, cannot exiſt, where the effects of public ſervices centre in the power or glory of the magiſtrate, or the government. This is the reaſon, politicians have ſought motives out of ſociety, to lead, or force men into its duties. They have exhibited and illuſtrated, by external motives, what, in ſpeculation, muſt have been an inexplicable paradox—they have induced men to give up their property, their ſervices, their perſons, to conſign the advantages of ſociety; and, in being ſlaves, to become the moſt wretched beings in nature: on motives merely ideal; a view to the joys of heaven, or apprehenſion of the torments of hell.

We obſerve, that motives have been invented or heightened, according to the exigencies of vicious governments; according to their deviations towards deſpotiſm; *and the laſt, the utmoſt effort of human*

human villainy, is diſcoverable in the doctrine of eternal damnation.

The effects of theſe motives, have been aſtoniſhing. That they ſhould have induced men gradually to relinquiſh their civil rights, is perhaps accountable: that, in the ebullitions of zeal for the eſtabliſhment of a new religion, they ſhould have enabled the firſt Chriſtians, who were excluded the advantages of ſociety or perſecuted in it, to yield up their wretched lives, or to ſeek the honors of martyrdom; is not ſurprizing. But when the religion of Chriſt and that of Mahomet were eſtabliſhed, that the great nations of the earth ſhould relinquiſh the rights of ſocial beings, and become the ſlaves of prieſts or kings, to obtain the rewards or avoid the puniſhments of another world—ſeems aſtoniſhing. The general prevalence of deſpotic power, is owing to this circumſtance. We know that Chriſtians and Mahometans were employed for centuries, in waſting the earth; deſtroying or enſlaving its inhabitants, by acts of military

conduct and valor, which rivalled the glory of Greece and Rome—on motives, apparently originating in another world.

I think hiſtory may render us competent to decide on the following propoſition:—

Are the motives of ſocial and public ſpirit, or the deſire of ſocial and public happineſs, ſufficient to hold men in ſociety; to produce the uſeful virtues of the mind and heart:—or is it neceſſary to have recourſe to the hopes of future rewards and the fear of future puniſhments? In other words, would men, would ſocieties, be moſt virtuous and happy, under the firm perſuaſion of the mortality, or the immortality of the human ſoul?

I ſhall make ſome efforts, on this ground, another time.

I am, my Lord,

Your moſt obedient

And moſt humble ſervant,

THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

LETTER XII.

MY LORD,

IN our enquiries, on the general ſubject of death, we are come to the important queſtions:

Whether the doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments be neceſſary or advantageous, to private morality and public happineſs? Or, whether a clear and firm perſuaſion, that we are to live only here, would effectually ſecure virtuous morals and general happineſs?

We are at perfect liberty to diſcuſs the queſtions; and to determine on them, without danger of committing offence againſt the ſuppoſed obligations of piety. Various

rious morals and various degrees of happineſs are formed from different cauſes; on the general, the only foundation furniſhed by Nature—a ſenſibility to pleaſure and pain. We bring into the world, only this ſenſibility—and the modifications of it into virtues or affections, are produced by cauſes, which however ſacred from ſuperſtition or policy, are in common with all other things, ſubject to examination and animadverſion.

A ſenſe of pleaſure or pain is the reſult of the exiſtence, and productive of the various qualities of individuals, who conſtitute ſocieties. This may be the only indiſputable truth in morals or politics. If any other had been equally important, it would have been equally evident. When the ſenſibility has received an indefinite variety of modifications, by the co-incidence of circumſtances or cauſes; and aſſumed the forms of virtues, vices, principles of morals, and maxims of government, not only different,

ent, but oppoſite to each other—we are loſt in the extenſive and intricate view. But if virtues, vices, principles, or conſtitutions of government, be taken in detail; the quantity of pleaſure and pain, or of happineſs and miſery, may be ſeparated and aſcertained, by an analyſis of thoſe compoſitions, in which they may be included. By aſcertaining the quantity of pleaſure and pain, in the effects of various principles, inſtitutions, cuſtoms, or opinions; we may determine their comparative value. Every thing is to be eſtimated in this manner, by the happineſs or miſery it produces. —— My Lord, we are to enquire, whether men would be moſt happy, under the firm perſuaſion of their mortality, or of their immortality?

I will ſtate the advantages, on each opinion, as fairly or impartially as I am able:—if you rectify my errors, I will thank you. Under the perſuaſion, that I may be immortal, I ſhould give the following reaſons, in favor of the doctrine.

That

That human cuſtoms and governments not producing, in all caſes, a ſufficient quantity of happineſs, to render life deſirable; in ſome, not ſufficient to render it tolerable—it is a wiſe and benevolent proviſion, that we ſhould have the hope or proſpect of a future ſtate; where experience may remedy our errors, or provide the proper means of eternal ſecurity and happineſs. If there were no real ground for the opinion; the very hope excited by it, would anſwer a ſimilar purpoſe: nay, this hope is the circumſtance which gives it a decided preference to the oppoſite opinion; for our enjoyment conſiſting more in hope than in poſſeſſion, a perſuaſion of the immortality of the human ſoul muſt be a perpetual ſource of ſatisfaction, which we could not derive from actual enjoyment. This is the only conſolation which can be imagined, under the miſeries ariſing from error and vice; which no conduct or prudence can remove: no circumſtances can deprive us of hope; therefore, no condition can be

be deſtitute of ſatisfaction.—This, I think, is the firſt and ſtrongeſt argument in favor of a future ſtate.

I ſhould alſo affirm, the doctrine is neceſſary to the continuance of human ſocieties, as they actually exiſt. — The prineiples of thoſe ſocieties are ſuch, as not to furniſh ſufficient motives for good conduct; without the rewards and puniſhments of a future world :—the hope or apprehenſion of theſe events hang over the mind in private; and deſtroy, in the bud, thoſe weeds, which would over-run the ſtate. In ſome communities, exiſtence depends on apprehenſions in regard to futurity: for life, in every view of it, becoming undeſirable, the people would throw it off with deteſtation; and ſuicide would be the general remedy for miſery—but 'that the fear of ſomething 'after death, puzzles the will.'

I ſhould add a ſtronger reaſon, in the opinion of ſome people—the neceſſity of remedying errors; of allotting rewards to the good, or puniſhments to the wicked,

ed, with more equity than is here exerciſed. In this department of the divine government, matters are ſo conducted, that the virtuous are frequently miſerable, and the vicious happy: and if a judgment ſhould not take place to invert theſe diſtributions; or to allot happineſs to the good and miſery to the wicked, Providence muſt be ſubject to imputations, which would diſhonor human governments. Indeed every circumſtance ſhew this to be a ſtate of trial for futurity: unequal periods of exiſtence; inequality of ſituations and advantages are various circumſtances of probation; the general wiſhes, hopes, nay, the fixed perſuaſion of mankind, that they ſhall ſurvive, are impreſſions of the divine hand; ſuggeſtions of the Deity, which he could not diſappoint, conſiſtently with benevolence and goodneſs. Every thing in nature ſeems to arrive at perfect maturity, or to anſwer the purpoſes of its creation, except man; who, if he is not to live hereafter, had better, in moſt caſes, not

to

to have lived at all.--Theſe are the ſtrongeſt reaſons, I know, to ſupport the utility of the doctrine.

On the other hand, under the perſuaſion, that I am, like all other creatures around me, only a mortal being—I ſhould ſay, the hope of futurity is pernicious in all the views that have been delineated. The preference of hope to poſſeſſion, is the effect of a weak and puerile imagination, which employs itſelf in viſions or reveries. Reaſon being converſant only in realities, knows no ſuch prinples. Even in inconvenient or wretched ſituations, where it may be ſuppoſed hope, by furniſhing employment for the imagination, may ſuſpend miſery, or be uſeful; it is the very circumſtance which rivets the chains of indolence and deſpair: it is the ignis fatuus, which draws off the man's attention from his immediate path; gradually multiplies his inconveniences and errors, until it plunges him in irremediable miſery. Perſons of ſuperior talents have occaſionally perceived the doctrine

trine of nature, reſpecting diſtant hopes. Julius Cæſar, when he landed an army in Britain, ſet fire to his ſhips: and the ſoldiers did their duty; which they might not have done, if, on the firſt difficulties, their imaginations could have recurred to Italy. Nature has formed and fixed us to this earth; all the intermediate ſpaces, which ſeparate us from other worlds, are impaſſable: we can conceive no means of communication.—— Here therefore, and here only, we are to fix our attention, to employ our talents, and to enjoy our happineſs. What folly, what cruelty, to hold up to the mind hopes of diſtant impoſſibilities; the firſt effect of which muſt be inattention to preſent and neceſſary duty: which inattention will produce error, ſtanding in need of ſtill ſtronger future hopes or future deluſions—until vice and miſery have nothing to alleviate them, but the reveries of weak or diſordered imaginations.

That

That ſocieties, formed on the opinion of a future life, depend on it for ſupport or continuance, may be true; but this circumſtance does not prove either the truth, or the utility of the opinion. Men enter into ſociety from neceſſity. They form conſtitutions to procure public happineſs. Where this object is obtained, the government always, and infallibly, ſupports itſelf. Men may reaſon fallaciouſly of political principles; but they feel truly in regard to happineſs and miſery. Any circumſtance, therefore, which draws the attention from the only end of human ſociety; the only plain or ſimple teſt by which all regulations, laws, and inſtitutions are to be tried—is an injury. This is the caſe with the doctrine of a future ſtate. It confuſes or perverts our ideas on the purpoſes of human ſociety. It teaches mankind to rank governments, magiſtrates, kings, and other occaſions of their ſufferings, as they do ſtorms, earthquakes, or peſtilences; among the ordinances of Providence, to which

which they are to ſubmit in a ſtate of trial, to obtain better conditions, or better ſituations in a future world. Who does not ſee, that all wretched conſtitutions of government owe their ſupport and continuance to this doctrine? It deludes or amuſes the people, from enquiries neceſſary to their relief. Falſe hope ſooths the mind under evils, which reaſon and virtue would remove. Patience, ſubmiſſion, hypocriſy, become the ſubſtitutes of thoſe great or excellent qualities, which would perfect the inſtitutions of ſocial life, and make communities happy. Where remedies can not be applied; where combinations of errors and faults have defeated every purpoſe of ſociety; have made a community the prey of a few, or of one—*a diabolical doctrine* hovers over the wretch who has nothing left: though ardently wiſhing to force himſelf from miſery—he is terrified into forbearance by the apprehenſion of eternal torments. Who will ſay, that deſpotiſm would find ſlaves in any part of the earth, if the doctrines

doctrines of futurity were withdrawn? Who will maintain, that any form of government, producing public evils or public miſeries, would long ſubſiſt; if men, having no hopes or fears beyond this world, had their attention confined to the regulations and intereſts of ſociety? If theſe things cannot be affirmed, or maintained—if deſpotiſm, tyranny, and oppreſſion, in various degrees, be the cauſes of all the miſeries we endure: if this doctrine be the principal ſupport of thoſe evils—what are the illuſions of pious romance, or the tales and legends of poetic ſuperſtition, when fairly compared with palpable and enormous miſchiefs! They are like the decorations of a fiend: charms to injure; or beauties to deſtroy.

It may occur to ſome prudent perſons, theſe ſentiments, whether true or falſe, are improper to be ſtated; as they may be miſunderſtood; or be imprudently applied. I will take care, they ſhall not be miſunderſtood, by any man who chuſes

chuſes to be informed on the ſubjects, in the moſt unequivocal phraſes of the Engliſh language. It is true, and it ſhould be obvious, that the doctrine of a future ſtate, either of rewards or puniſhments—by holding diſtant and falſe expectations before the mind, draws its attention from its immediate and proper employment—that the miniſters of that doctrine, by blending with the officers and magiſtrates of communities, have had the addreſs to keep the end or purpoſe of ſociety out of view; have prevailed on men to acquieſce in the deprivation of civil rights, or the loſs of public happineſs, by the promiſes and threats of futurity;—that this doctrine, has in all ages ſerved the purpoſes of deſpotiſm, tyranny, or political oppreſſion--that, by preventing ſlaves from withdrawing by ſuicide, from a life uniformly wretched, it perpetuates miſery,—and by furniſhing pretences for upholding the motley equivocal fabricks, called forms of government—it is the occaſion of all the evils which deſolate the world.

Away

Away then, with that caution which would check enquiry and freedom on the ſubject. Away with that ſelfiſh diſhoneſt principle, which would *keep truths from public view*, or hide them among the uſeleſs arcana of a daſtardly philoſophy! What are philoſophers! What is philoſophy! What is truth! if they affect not the principles and inſtitutions of ſociety! The miſer, who buries his treaſure in the earth; and the philoſopher, who keeps the effects of his enquiries from public view; are characters equally uſeleſs, equally contemptible in the eſtimation of reaſon. But, in the name of common ſenſe, what renders the doctrine of immortality ſacred: what ſhould make us cautious in examining its truth or falſehood; or plainly declaring our opinions? It has had full time to ſhew its importance and utility to the world. If it does not bring indiſputable credentials; if its utility is ſo far from being queſtionable, that it may be demonſtrated a cer-

tain, general, and important injury—will its pretended utility, to keep the common people in order, under governments which oppreſs them, be aſſigned as a reaſon for treating it with reſpect? It furniſhes the buttreſſes of wretched and ruinous fabrics, which afford neither comfort nor ſhelter to their miſerable inhabitants. The ſooner they are withdrawn, the ſooner will the people be furniſhed with better habitations.

As to the preſumption in favor of futurity, from apparent errors to be remedied; ſketches to be filled up; or plans to be executed—this will not bear much conſideration. It is the ſuggeſtion of human vanity and ignorance. There is not a circumſtance in the world, that has the leaſt appearance of error or imperfection—but as it refers to human ſocieties. A miſtake in the divine government is impoſſible; no man has it in his power to commit an offence againſt the Deity; no man, who has an underſtanding above that of an

an idiot, will talk of ſketches to be filled up, or plans to be executed in the adminiſtration of the univerſe. That the lives of animals are of unequal length; that their portions of happineſs or miſery are unequal, may be true; as it may be true, that the moſt fragrant and beautiful flowers may be trodden with contempt, while others, leſs valuable, are cultivated in the gardens of princes. Will it be ſaid, becauſe the violet has drooped unobſerved in the wilderneſs, or has been cruſhed by the foot of a brute—that it is entitled to a reſurrection, in order to anſwer the purpoſes of its creation? The blooming infant, ſnatched away by death, is like that violet nipped in the bud: each having equally obeyed the laws of the Deity, in juſt entering life, and diſappearing; each equally deſtitute of all claim to immortality. That we ſhould wiſh the child we love never to die; nay, that affection ſhould hold before us the image of a beloved friend; and make it

difficult to credit, that ſo much excellence can be no more—all theſe are amiable deluſions, which I have often and deeply felt: but they prove nothing to reſt our hopes upon in the cool hours of reflection. They amount only to wiſhes; which are among the moſt frivolous and moſt injurious occupations of the human mind.

In ſhort, if the doctrine of a future ſtate, by withdrawing our attention from preſent intereſts, makes us miſunderſtand or neglect them — If, in the long trial we have had of its effects—they have not been favorable to private or public virtue —If, under vicious governments, it has been ſo far from correcting their effects, and producing virtue or happineſs in oppoſition to them, that it has been the ſupport of thoſe governments; nay, that the worſt ſpecies of deſpotiſm, civil, political, and religious, has been created by this doctrine—it is time it ſhould be reprobated; *the efforts of the world ſhould be exerted to break this great chain, which bends*

bends the necks of its inhabitants to ſlavery and wretchedneſs.

I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

Your moſt obedient

And moſt humble ſervant,

THE AUTHOR.

A

LITURGY

ON

THE PRINCIPLES OF THEISM.

Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένετο, Ζεὺς ὕςατος ἀρχικέραυνος,
Ζεὺς κεφαλὴ, Ζεὺς μέσσα· Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται·
Ζεὺς ἄρσην γένετο· Ζεὺς ἄμβροτος ἐπλετο νυμφη.
Ζεὺς πυθμην γαίης τε κ', οὐρανοῦ ἀςεροεντος.
Ζεὺς πνοιὴ παντων. Ζεὺς ἀκαματε πυρὸς ὁρμή.
Ζεὺς πόντε ῥίζα, Ζεὺς ἥλιος ἠδὲ σελὴνη.
Ζεὺς βασιλευς, Ζεὺς αὐτὸς απάντων ἀχιγενεθλος.

Orph. Fragm. p. 368.

PREFACE.

THIS Liturgy is not, like the Engliſh Book of Common Prayer, a tranſlation of the Roman Catholic Miſſal;—it is not, like the imitations and amendments of that tranſlation, intended to form a ſect, for the emolument of the author:—it is a ſpecimen of Public Service, in which Philoſophers might join, without inſulting their underſtandings, or corrupting their hearts.

FIRST SERVICE.

MINISTER, OR READER.

POWERFUL Ruler of the Univerſe! whatever thou art—whether Nature neceſſarily exiſting; or the animating ſpirit of mortals,—we adore Thee, who by impenetrable methods conducteſt all things to Thy purpoſes.

READER, *joined by the Congregation.*

Thou haſt the univerſe for Thy temple: Thy homage, is the meditation of wiſdom; and Thy incenſe, a pure and virtuous heart.

READER.

Nothing we are capable of conceiving, approaches Thy nature; which has neither form nor eſſence, comprehenſible by us. Univerſal Principle of all exiſtence; and the centre in which all things terminate! Source of life and death; of motion or

reſt! The heavens, the earth, and the ſea, are preſerved by Thee; but the creation, or deſtruction of worlds, ſeems indifferent to Thy happineſs!

PEOPLE, *joining the Miniſter.*

By the viſible things of this world; and their admirable order, we conceive there is a cauſe of them; that cauſe we call God: but we have no idea, or image of him, in our minds.

READER.

Man is the moſt excellent of all objects in our knowledge; a machine reflecting on his own motions. Whether the general principle actuating Nature, be analogous to that of man, we cannot know: we muſt judge of the picture, without hoping to know the artiſt.

In the frail compoſition of mortals, there is no principle implanted, either of conſciouſneſs or ſenſation, which is not equally diffuſed through the beautiful and expanded ſyſtem of nature; or which is not regulated by ſome general or uniform cauſe. This is the object of univerſal

ſal adoration; and this is infinitely degraded by all ſimilitude with chance, neceſſity, or the random concourſe of matter. It is this univerſal principle, which combines the elements of which we are compoſed; develops our powers; enables us to chuſe objects which are agreeable, or to avoid thoſe which are painful; conducts us to our diſſolution; and ſubjects us to that law, from which nothing can be exempted.

PEOPLE.

In him, we live and move, and have our being.

READER.

Every thing exiſting, ſeems to be the conſequence of properties in nature; mingling or changing its forms, producing good and evil, order and diſorder. We are blind, when we imagine blind cauſes; we are ignorant of the regulating power of Nature, when we attribute them to neceſſity or chance; we are not better informed, when we refer them to intelligence analogous to the nature of man: we

we invent words, when not acquainted with things; and believe ourſelves wiſe, when we obſcure ideas we cannot analyze or define. We renounce all myſterious incomprehenſible language, concerning matter acting blindly, the neceſſity of eſſences, or the divinity of chance. We do not conſider nature, or the God of nature, as having the organs or the intelligence of man; but as the centre, origin, and cauſe of all perceptions, all ideas, all intuition, all thoughts, all plans, and all actions.

We will not perſiſt in defining thy nature, or complimenting thy excellencies, O ineffable and univerſal cauſe: it involves us in a confuſſion of embarraſſing ideas, which is inſupportable. To compoſe Thee of the different parts of nature, is to involve ourſelves in the difficulty of a limited univerſe; or of infinity conſiſting of parts. To ſuppoſe Thee an individual, is ſeparating Thee from the univerſe, and deſtroying Thy infinity. To paint, by our imaginations, an idea of an infinite Being, is impoſſible: yet, to doubt the exiſtence

tence of one uniform, univerſal cauſe, which every ſtep we take in the path of knowledge indiſputably proves, is to doubt the ſtrongeſt accumulation of evidence, which our minds are capable of receiving. Whatever we aver, is in language formed on our immediate neceſſities; whatever we imagine, as to the manner of thy exiſtence, by means of powers limited to our preſent wants, is ſo far from leading us to the truth, that it often makes us loſe every idea of Thee. It is not neceſſary our imaginations ſhould comprehend Thee, as they do not comprehend our own natures.

RESPONSE.

It is ſufficient, that the evidence of thy exiſtence, be as certain and inexplicable as our own.

READER.

In this conviction, we conſider Thee with affections; which are nothing in regard to Thee; but important to ourſelves. They baniſh fear, inquietude, and diſtruſt; they extinguiſh inhuman zeal, and thoſe

ſentiments

ſentiments of partiality or hatred, which accompany all ſuperſtitions: they purify that philoſophic and religious enthuſiaſm, incident to all good men who contemplate the works of nature; and they furniſh them with piety every way worthy a reaſonable mind.

In aſcribing attributes to Thee, O ineffable, incomprehenſible Being, all language muſt fail. The idea of a cauſe of all things; of a Being comprizing all poſſible perfections in an infinite degree —is an abyſs ſo vaſt, ſo unfathomable; its immenſity overwhelms; and all our faculties are annihilated.

Superior to all things; involving all things, God cannot do any thing for glory!

In the diſpoſitions of nature, regarding ſimilar claſſes of being, there is an uniformity analogous to equity; but nothing like mutual obligation: we would do well, therefore, neither to adore, or to arraign, the equity of Divine Providence.

The

The term Goodneſs, moſt honourable to human character, is inadequate to our idea of that diſpoſition of nature, which produces all its happineſs. Thy exiſtence, which we underſtand not, is the foundation of ours, which is incomprehenſible. In regarding that exiſtence; in ſtudying its preſervation by the regulations of reaſon, we obey Thee; we yield to the impulſe of ſentiments with which Thou haſt inſpired us; and we find our happineſs in ourſelves, in purſuing the biaſs or direction of that modification Thou haſt given us.

Wiſdom, Juſtice, Mercy, Patience, are human virtues; and the application to Thee is abſurd. In thus retailing Thy excellencies, we deſtroy every idea of Thy infinity; and reduce Thee into the Magiſtrate of a limited empire.

Our ideas, even of Supreme Power deliberately exerciſed, are feeble or diſproportionate. All action, all cauſes, are eſſential to Thy nature; and as neceſſarily ſuppoſed as Thy exiſtence.

In

In endeavoring to apply to Thee, any of the qualities or virtues of men, we are impeded by inviolable obſtacles. Every effect differs from its cauſe, in the very circumſtances which conſtitute an effect. We are thy creatures; effects from Thee; and may have no qualities in common with our Creator. Our induſtry; our knowledge; our wiſdom convince us, He is ſo much above all the ideas or images we can form, that our very efforts to define and repreſent him, often cloud or embaraſs our underſtandings.

It is our buſineſs, however, to inſtruct ourſelves in all the orders of beauty, in all the utility of particular forms. We gradually riſe to general cauſes; with hearts more expanded, and minds more comprehenſive, we perpetually ſeek that cauſe which actuates the univerſe.

PEOPLE.

We cannot, by ſearching, find out God.

READER.

READER.

It is to man, to ſociety, to our country, our talents are important, and our virtues ſhould be directed. If we perceive not the moral ties, which bind man to an inſect, how ſhall we ſpeak of thoſe which bind us to the Deity; before whom we find ourſelves annihilated, when we glance our thoughts at his being or perfections.

While the pleaſures of novelty, beauty, or grandeur, are excited by the contemplation of Nature, the cauſe cannot be imperfectly conſidered without emotion. When the ſun riſes; diſpels the morning clouds; or gilds the earth with its rays, all ſenſible beings experience ſentiments of ſatisfaction: the birds ſing; the cattle low; and man, feeling his exiſtence a bleſſing, correſponds with the general harmony; redoubles his ſatisfaction, by reflecting on that univerſal Power which renews his daily joy.

Awful objects are ſublime, and dilate the ſoul with pleaſure. This is the enthuſiaſm

thuſiaſm of devotion. Details of unconnected facts in nature, or the random operations of blind fatality, are clouded with cold and melancholy. But when the ſlighteſt analogies of deſign are pointed out, they become intereſting; the heart is warmed by admiration; and the purſuit gratifies the beſt feelings of the mind.

Let us guard ourſelves in this perilous ſituation. We are approaching the confines of ſuperſtition. Let us beware, of flattering a cauſe, which acts by fixed principles, and of which nothing can alter the effects: implore not a Power, which, by the diſcord of elements, and the inceſſant production or diſſolution of forms, maintains the harmony and ſtability of the world: and expect not, the plan of Nature, or the properties of beings, ſhould be changed on our applications: fire will burn, or diſeaſe conſume us; and the moſt impetuous cries will not prevent the miſery of our country, if governed by weakneſs or deſpotiſm.

PEOPLE.

To oppoſe, or correct the deſigns of Nature, is folly; to regulate, or wiſh to change them, is madneſs!

READER.

Above all things, let us avoid the deluſions of fanaticiſm. As it is abſurd to deny the exiſtence of God; becauſe that exiſtence may be incomprehenſible; it is folly and extravagance to aſcribe qualities to him, which exiſt only in our own nature; or to tremble before an image, the parts of which our fancies have arbitrarily combined. The moſt odious divinities have been created by ignorance or impoſture: credulity has cheriſhed them; they are reverenced from habit; and tyranny ſupports their intereſts, becauſe tyranny can profit only by the folly or miſery of mankind. Our imaginations wander, when we quit experience. Indolence has recourſe to example or authority, to avoid action or reflection; and we attempt to remedy our ignorance, by adopting words that have no meaning. There can be no

virtue,

virtue, where God is the enemy of virtue, the tyrant of the human race; where he violates thoſe laws of nature, of which he is ſuppoſed the author. Let us ſoar above the thick atmoſphere of falſehood, myſtery, and contradiction.— Let us carefully avoid thoſe men, who are aſſociated into claſſes or profeſſions, to profit by our errors, to corrupt, enſlave, to render us vicious and miſerable. Imagination, enthuſiaſm, habit, prepoſſeſſion, authority, and various ſpecies of tyrannic force, are the ſubſtitutes of knowledge, reflection, reaſon; and oblige men to profeſs opinions deemed neceſſary to keep depraved ſocieties in order. We renounce the ſcience of religious chimeras, ſo profitable to its profeſſors; ſo fatal to their fellow-citizens. Tyrants of the earth; the moſt wicked, the moſt deteſtable of men, are the models on which the character of the Deity has been generally formed; and the moſt oppreſſive government, the ſymbol of the Divine Adminiſtration. It is to a capricious deſ-

pot;

pot; to a malignant genius; to a formidable demon; the offspring of ignorance or calamity—that men commonly pay their ſervile and degrading homage. We will not perſiſt, in imagining the Deity iniquitous or cruel; laying ſnares for his offspring, and puniſhing them for falling.

READER, *joined by the Congregation.*

Deſpotic government has not produced a tyrant; human nature has not generated a monſter, ſo cruel, ſo revengful, ſo wicked, as the odious phantom, to which ſuperſtition is devoted!

END OF THE FIRST SERVICE.

SECOND SERVICE.

READER.

WE are aſſembled, ſolemnly to recognize ſentiments, which may induce us to avoid the evils of ſuperſtition, and guard againſt the apathy of the votaries of chance. Things are not, to one another, diſunited or independent; there ſeems to be coherence in the whole; and we infer order, proportion, or ſomething more analogous to deſign than to chance. All things are related; branches to trees; trees to earth, water, and air, which yield their nutriment: ſeeds, fruits, and leaves, to the animals which feed on them: animals to one another, and to the elements in which they exiſt; wings fitting them for the air, fins for the ſea, and feet for the earth. All theſe relations take place, where we have knowledge; where we have none, we can form no judgment: and we muſt ſubmit to the reſtraints of incapacity

capacity and ignorance. We ſhould exhibit ourſelves vain and conceited idiots, were we to arraign the univerſe, where we are as moths or atoms; and where the ſmall or trifling parts we comprehend, are excellent and admirable: or to confine all ideas of order and perfection to ourſelves, while we deny it to that Nature, or principle of Nature, which gave us being.

RESPONSE.

The laſt ſtage of preſumptuous ignorance, is that of beings affecting wiſdom, to correct the wiſdom by which they were formed.

READER.

We ſee an order, analogous to intelligent diſpoſition, in the conſtituent parts of the ſyſtem we inhabit; in a combined ſeries of cauſes and effects, producing the active exiſtence or ſupport of the whole. All things are ſubject to the laws of this order; and all beings are obliged to anſwer its general ends. But the ſyſtem is ſometimes alarmed! Comets, in purſuing

their courſes, diſturb its tranquillity, or excite terror in the people, to whom all things have wonders. Our own ſeaſons ſeem diſplaced; the elements diſpute the dominion of the world; the ſea paſſeth its limits; the ſolid earth is ſhaken; the mountains blaze; ſterility deſolates the plains; or peſtilence ſweeps off animals and men. Affrighted mortals lift up their hands to ſome imagined cauſe of the apparent diſorder; while Nature is incapable of admitting the ſlighteſt deviation from her laws, which alter or diſſolve all things at proper times, to aſſume new arrangements and new forms.

The Congregation joining the READER.

The cauſe of theſe alterations, we may never be able to define, in languages formed on the wants or purpoſes of mortals: our abilities may not be competent to the undertaking: but we can avoid the preſumption of referring them to ſuch abſurdities as abſolute neceſſity, blind fate, or Nature operating by chance.

READER.

READER.

Our efforts will ever be vain; though often commendable; to penetrate the ſanctuary of Nature. Matter, of which all things around us is formed, is incomprehenſible; we cannot define, with clearneſs, its mode of affecting us. How ſhall we ſpeak of Nature, or of Nature's God! Every thing tends to convince us, we ſhould not, for we cannot ſeek the Deity out of nature. Every thing to us is impoſſible, which is not produced by its laws. Our ideas of matter or its forms, are imperfect or defective—how then ſhall we preſume, on the concluſions of our underſtandings, concerning the ſource of all elements, all principles, all properties, all modes of exiſtence and action!

The rocks which balance the earth; the flowers that decorate its ſurface; the beings who are born, brought to maturity, and periſh on it;—are all implied in that ſublime idea, which no language is formed to expreſs. We ſee no-

thing, we know nothing, but material beings, and the laws by which they act.

The READER, *joined by the People.*

The general principle, in which all action, all intelligence, all pleaſure, all pain, all good, all evil, are involved, we always miſrepreſent, when we attempt to deſcribe; and we may be ſaid to degrade, even by affixing him names!

READER.

All the world is one perpetual ſcene of tranſmigration: an animal no ſooner quits one form than it aſſumes another; nature is in perpetual youth. Every being is convertible into every thing; all is reducible to one: the univerſe, and the wonderful principle that actuates it, are always the ſame. It is our buſineſs to learn the laws of that great whole, of which we feel the influence; to contemplate its energy; or to apply real diſcoveries to our real intereſt and happineſs. When ignorant of its combinations, properties, or forces, the univerſe is a ſcene of illuſions. We will ſhake off that ſtupid indo-

indolence, which wears the form of reſpect for antiquity, or the inſtitutions of our fathers; and have recourſe to bold, laborious experiments, which alone can force out the ſecrets of Nature. By accurate and attentive reſearches, we will endeavor to trace all particular chains of cauſes, into a general principle, a central power in Nature; to which all powers, all eſſences, all energies are ſubject; which regulates the movements of all beings; and, in different methods, induces their concurrence in its general plan or purpoſe; which is the life, action, and preſervation of the whole, by the perpetual changes or revolutions of its parts.

M A N.

WE are loſt, when we attempt to imagine, the indefinite ſucceſſion of combinations, which take place in the univerſe. —Suns may be extinguiſhed; planets blown away as duſt in the incomprehenſible regions of ſpace: other ſuns and

other planets be formed, and deſcribe their revolutions. Man! a ſmall portion of this earth! a point in the univerſe almoſt imperceptible!—ſhall man deem the whole made for him? or that he is the confidant and ſovereign of Nature? the inſect of a day, ſhall he conceive himſelf immortal? —while all nature is changing, while nothing retains a permanent form, ſhall he plead exemption from the inviolable law? —and while amuſing himſelf with vain opinions, ſhall he remain the only creature that anticipates his fate, with horror and regret?

Let us relinquiſh the abſurdity of making man the centre of the univerſe. Let us not reſt our ſentiments and manners, on contradictory opinions, abſtract ſpeculations, abſurd or diſcordant oracles; but on principles deduced from Nature, founded on experience and reaſon. Let the involved or combined intereſts of individuals and ſocieties, furniſh the maxims of our morality; as they never vary with

with the caprices of imagination, or the impulſes of irregular paſſion.

The People joining the MINISTER.

It is not given us to know firſt principles; not even our own origin: but it is given us to have reaſon and virtue; and in all things beyond them, to confeſs our ignorance.

READER.

Whence are we? Whether produced from eternity? Whether the tranſient effects of natural cauſes? Whether to continue in ſucceſſion for ever? Or to give place to new ſpecies of being?—all is beyond our knowledge!—The relation of things to us, as we now exiſt, either as individuals, or members of ſociety, is all we can comprehend; all that is neceſſary to our happineſs.

CONFESSION.

IF we have been defective in our conduct, we have ſinned againſt the principles of our exiſtence; againſt the rules of ſociety;

ciety; againſt ourſelves, in foregoing the moſt deſirable advantages.

It is impoſſible we ſhould reſiſt the will of God; or, that the Author of all beings, ſhould have enemies of his own forming.

Let us avoid the inconveniences of ſuperſtition, the principal of which is the habit of committing offences; and actually becoming, by conſtantly confeſſing ourſelves, criminal. Let us not be familiar with vices, in the hope of remedying them by repentance; let not the habit of conſidering, or confeſſing ourſelves unfaithful to God, diſpoſe us to become unjuſt and diſhonorable to men!

RESPONSE.

Amen.

PRAYER.

THE homage of man, ſhould be on the altar of virtue. It would be folly to expreſs our wiſhes or prayers, in regard to events, which are the effects of univerſal and immutable arrangements; as it would

would be, that water may not moiſten, or that fire may not burn.

We are invited by Nature inceſſantly to augment the ſum of our happineſs; not to humble or deteſt ourſelves; not to ſacrifice, to any chimerical idol, the ſoft and endearing affections of our hearts.

We will not offer up to Heaven, vows, ſacrifices, or oblations, to eſcape misfortunes, which are the conſequences of our own negligence and ignorance; the folly of our inſtitutions, cuſtoms, or opinions; the abſurdity of our laws; and the iniquity of our religions. We will not bow before a tyrant, be his imagined abode in heaven or in earth. Deſpotiſm depraves, in order to enſlave us: ignorance and ſervitude render us wicked and wretched. Wearied with idle fables, impenetrable myſteries, or puerile ceremonies, we fix our thoughts on intelligible objects, ſenſible truths, and uſeful knowledge.

We are aſhamed of that frenzy, which, to prevent the ſmalleſt evil to ourſelves, has tempted us to aſk, that the eternal

chain of things may be broken, or induced us to hate and torment each other for unintelligible opinions.—— We deſpiſe that vanity, or ſelfiſhneſs, which would lead us, for the good or evil that may affect ourſelves, to impute favor or malice to the Power actuating the univerſe; or to imagine our cries and vows can interrupt an univerſal force acting by univerſal laws. We ſubmit to our lot: we ſeek, in Nature, remedies provided for the ills ſhe occaſions; ſalutary productions to remove our diſeaſes; experience and truth to counteract our errors. She is impartial to all her productions; all things are ſubject to her laws; it muſt be by the ſuſpenſion of thoſe laws, not by our ſufferings, that her harmony would be interrupted, or diſorder could take plaee.

Let us no longer affect to deſpiſe realities, while we meditate on chimeras; or neglect experience to be occupied by conjectures, prayers, or wiſhes: let us cultivate reaſon; and before we attempt

to

to aſcertain the lot of mortals, in future regions, let us render them happy in their preſent abode.

RESPONSE.

Amen.

TRUTH.

OVER every atom of the human frame, we find diffuſed a ſenſe of pleaſure or abhorrence of pain. Every movement we make diſcovers, or confirms, the fundamental principle of virtue, that pleaſure is annexed to actions tending to our preſervation and utility; pain to the contrary. Among the objects affecting us, we chuſe, we add, we multiply, we divide; until the buſineſs is complicated, and an error in the proceſs confounds us. Inſtead of deploring our misfortune with unmanly deſpair; inſtead of unavailing confeſſions: inſtead of committing ourſelves to others who may deceive us, or praying to Heaven to do, what can be done only by ourſelves; we muſt recur to the elements

ments of this noble ſcience, and correct the error in its principles. If we have no capacity, or have no leiſure for theſe deductions; let us not ſubmit our underſtandings to the authority of others; a ſtate of degradation much below any ſpecies of ignorance: as the belief of mathematical truths are not enjoined on thoſe who do not underſtand them; the truths of morality, or religion, are enjoined on thoſe only who comprehend them.

In all the paths of knowledge, we find theſe general marks to direct us—truth is ſimple, error complicate; the voice of truth is clear or intelligible, that of error ambiguous, enigmatical, myſterious; the road pointed out by truth, is direct, open, and pleaſant, while that of impoſture is oblique, ſhadowy, and perplexing.

VIRTUE.

DAUGHTER of reaſon, of experience, of Nature! O raiſe us above the noxious atmoſphere of falſehood, myſtery, and con-

contradiction! We do not act from mere love or hatred, hope or fear; but from a ſpirit of order, and the concluſions of the underſtanding. The ſuperſtitious is good, when he is ſo, merely from paſſion; and paſſions are not permanent. In proportion as our reaſon is cultivated, our minds are removed from diſorder. Lively but balanced paſſions, lead us to pleaſures, never to crimes. We are induced, by unavoidable reflection, as well as by irreſiſtible paſſions, to propoſe more pleaſure by living with each other, cultivating mutual confidence or love, and acquit ourſelves of the duties of friendſhip or gratitude, than by any confined or ſelfiſh gratifications. While we learn to eſteem ourſelves in proportion to our talents and virtues; and never ſuffer concealed vices or ſecret paſſions, to debaſe us in our own eyes; let us ſerve and honor human ſociety by probity or attention to its duties; and by the utmoſt caution avoid the real diſhonor of being uſeleſs or burthenſome members.

Nature,

Nature, replete with intelligence, ſentiment, and action, is continually exhibiting events aſtoniſhing to man, who remains but a moment to conſider them; and has neither time nor means to penetrate their cauſes. It is our firſt concern, to expel all extravagant ideas of ourſelves or our deſtination; to have recourſe to intellectual induſtry; to keep ſcrupulouſly to the path of experience, which alone can direct the means to ſatisfy our deſires, and remove or diminiſh the evils we endure.

RESPONSE.

Our good and evil, are not to be ſought at the threſholds of ſanctuaries; but in the receſſes of the mind.

CANDOR.

WHILE others attend to the ſurface of nature, or analize its common elements—let us fix our eyes on its moſt beautiful productions, the minds, characters, and works of thoſe exalted men, who

who have lived in every age. We ſhall thus acquire the art of thinking juſtly and acting nobly. We regret the fates of all thoſe benefactors of the world, who have been ill-treated in it; and we deeply feel the reproach or diſhonor it caſts on the human race. We would expiate this moſt odious ſpecies of ingratitude, by an indulgent attention to all great and good men, even in their errors and failings; and do every thing in our power to mark with infamy that fanaticiſm, whether civil or religious, which leads men to perſecute virtue or merit, in perſecuting thoſe who combat their prejudices. That order of men, among whom an unreſtrained enquiry prevails; who think on all ſubjects; is the nobleſt, the beſt in all communities: and evils always ariſe from the great who oppreſs, or the people who are oppreſſed.

If we muſt be amuſed with phantoms, let us allow the ſame privilege to others; and while we impreſs our minds with the abſolute neceſſity, that men ſhould be peaceable,

peaceable, juſt, and beneficent; let us ever recollect, that the field of opinion has no incloſures; and that nothing can be more unimportant than our manner of thinking on ſubjects inacceſſible to reaſon.

The READER, *joined by the Congregation.*

All wiſe; all important conſiderations, lead us to candor, indulgence, toleration, and humanity.

FINIS.